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A QUEEN'S KNIGHT

THE LIFE OF COUNT AXEL DE FERSEN

BY

MILDRED CARNEGY

AUTHOR OF
"KINGS AND QUEENS OF FRANCE"

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"This worship of the Queen,
That honour too wherein she holds him—
This was the sunshine that hath given the man
A growth, a name that branches o'er the rest
And strength against all odds."

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The Illustration on the Cover is of Count Axel de Fersen taken from a medallion in the possession of Countess Südow.

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A QUEEN'S KNIGHT

CHAPTER I

1774–1775

The ball at Versailles—The masked ball at the Opera—The Dauphine of France—Her appearance—Her character—Her difficulties—The Dauphin—His coldness to his wife—Madame du Barry's jealousy—Mesdames de France—The Dauphine's love for children—Her hatred of etiquette—Axel Fersen—His parents the Fersens—His Grand Tour—Extracts from his *Journal*.

A BALL was taking place in one of the magnificent *salons* of Versailles on January 10, 1774. The Grooms of the Household, dressed in their gorgeous liveries, were going in and out among the guests attending to their wants. At the end of the ball-room was a buffet, laden with huge baskets of fruit and sweetmeats, and urns filled with rich wines, where the guests refreshed themselves from time to time.

A gallery running round the ball-room was full of people; and they looked down upon

an extraordinarily brilliant scene. The dances were slow and stately, and the intricacies of the quadrilles and minuets were rendered with the most perfect grace and correctness by the dancers. The gentlemen were attired in the Court dress of the Henri IV period and carried their plumed hats in their hands. The rich satins and brocades of the ladies were elaborately adorned with priceless lace and jewels, and the polished floor of the *salon* reflected their pretty feet encased in the daintiest shoes of silk and satin.

Above, the god Hercules, sitting in the midst of thick rolling clouds, looked down upon the scene—for the ceiling was a masterpiece of the great painter Lemoine, and represented the apotheosis of the god of strength.

Marie Antoinette, the beautiful young Dauphine of France, was present at the ball, surrounded by her ladies. As she watched the moving throng of guests, one face among them attracted her attention. It was that of a young man of eighteen, tall and slight of figure, and dressed with elegance in the height of fashion. There was something in the expression of the boyish young face, in the depths of the grave blue eyes, that riveted the attention of the Dauphine. He seemed so

utterly different from the usual "butterfly" type of courtier that was always to be found at Versailles. His quiet bearing marked him out at once from all the volatile French gentlemen around him. There was an indefinable air of distinction about him that interested the Dauphine. Upon inquiring his name she was told that he was the young Count Axel de Fersen, son of the well-known Swedish nobleman Senator Fersen. Presently the Comte de Creutz, the Swedish ambassador, stepped forward and presented his young countryman to the Dauphine. She murmured a few polite words; he bowed low, retired, and mingled again among the guests.

. . . . .

They met again three weeks later. This time it was in the great Opera House at Paris. The season for masked balls had just begun, and would continue till Lent. The Dauphine enjoyed nothing better than these *bals masqués*, where she could throw off the wearisome restraints of etiquette, and indulge in her love for a little mischief and mild flirtation. She was, after all, only a girl of sixteen, and it was but natural that her high spirits should find some such outlet. A large number

of guests, the ladies in masks and dominoes, were assembled in the huge amphitheatre of the Opera House. It was some time before it was generally known that the Dauphin, the Dauphine, and the Comte de Provence,* were present. Even the Dauphin threw off his shyness and amused himself chatting to the guests.

The Dauphine, in her black velvet domino, imagined herself to be unrecognised, and entered into the fun of the ball with true girlish zest. Recognising the young Swedish Comte de Fersen among the guests, she went up to him and entered into a long and lively conversation with him. He was not aware of her identity; he answered her sprightly talk with his usual grave courtesy. As she talked to him, people watched (for she was known to every one), and whispered: "Who is this stranger to whom our Dauphine is showing so much favour? Who can this happy mortal be?" When she unmasked, they crowded round her, and their ill-bred curiosity obliged her speedily to retire into her private box.

It was three o'clock before Axel Fersen left the ball-room, somewhat elated and excited by the marked favour so fair a princess had

* The Dauphin's brother.

shown him. This was the first real meeting between the two, and, as a French historian writes, "A peine se furent-ils vus, ils se reconnurent" ("Hardly had they seen each other than they knew each other").

. . . . .

Marie Antoinette, Archduchess of Austria, had been Dauphine of France for four years at the time of which we are speaking. Hers was a delightful personality, and the expression so often applied to her, "full of charm," describes her exactly. Her features were not strikingly handsome, but the animation and sweetness of her expression made her face beautiful. She had a dazzling complexion of milk and roses, masses of red-gold hair, large blue eyes, and a perfect figure; but the lower lip, like that of most of the Hapsburgs, was somewhat too protruding, and the forehead too high for perfect beauty. She moved with the most exquisite gracefulness. "She walked," says Mme de Boigne, "better than any woman in France. Never did woman curtsy with such grace, saluting ten persons by one bend of the body, and giving each his or her share by the movement of her head and eyes. In a word, it would have come as naturally to every man to bring forward a

throne for her as to offer a chair to any other woman."

The Dauphine's education had been somewhat deficient, for her mother, the great Empress Maria Theresa, had been too much preoccupied with affairs of State to give much personal supervision to the education of her large family.

Marie Antoinette had always disliked lessons, and all through her life she never cared for reading or study. In her early married days she rarely opened a book. Maria Theresa was always exhorting her daughter to read. "Try to fill your mind with good reading," she wrote; "do not neglect to turn this sort of learning to good account; it is more useful to you than anything else—doubly so, because you are not accomplished in any way. You are no musician, you cannot paint or draw, nor are you possessed of any special talent—which makes me revert again to your reading."

But Maria Theresa's exhortations fell on somewhat heedless ears. Marie Antoinette could never conquer her aversion for serious reading. With infinite trouble she laboured through a volume of English History in her early married days, and triumphantly re-

ported the achievement to her mother, but she did not repeat the trying experiment. She found it difficult enough to keep her attention during mass, and a book still exists, magnificently bound and bearing her arms, which tells its own significant tale. It is entitled *The Book of Hours*, but its binding only is of a devotional character, for when opened it proves to be a particularly "spicy" novel called *The Story of Ernestine*. This ingenious book must have been specially devised for Marie Antoinette's edification during mass. Madame de Boigne says in her *Memoirs* of the Dauphine: "She did not even seek the information society can give. If a serious topic was introduced, she looked bored. Her conversation was always abrupt and superficial; she darted from one subject to another, and took pleasure only in the trifles of the day. Her great delight was to hear all the current gossip and scandal of the Court."

Her brother, the Archduke Joseph, used to scold her playfully about her incurable frivolity. "Amiable person that you are!" he would say to her. "You think of nothing but frivolity and the toilette and your pleasures through the livelong day!" But giddy and frivolous as the Princess undoubtedly was, she

was not shallow, and in the background of all her *légèreté* there were sterling qualities, which came to the front in the days of adversity. Her brother Joseph, who was never tired of censuring her for her giddiness, recognised the real worth of her character:

"She is an amiable and virtuous woman," he wrote—"rather giddy, but with a foundation of virtue and rectitude which really deserves all respect; combined with a quickness of intelligence and an accuracy of penetration which often surprises me." Though she indulged in occasional little flirtations, a natural purity and self-respect always kept Marie Antoinette in the path of virtue.

She loved to please and to give pleasure; nothing delighted her more than to do small kindnesses to her friends, and these she did in her own peculiarly graceful way. "No one knows as you do how to make use of this small change," Fersen used to say to her in after days. "J'aime qu'on ne me quitte jamais mécontent" ("I like no one ever to leave me dissatisfied") was a favourite saying of Marie Antoinette's

A desire to be in the height of the fashion often led her to do the most foolish and ill-advised things. Mme de Boigne says: "She

dressed to be fashionable, ran into debt to be fashionable, and flirted for the same reason. To be a pretty woman entirely in the fashion seemed to her the summit of ambition." It must be remembered that the young Princess had no one to guide her at the French Court, and that hers was a difficult path to tread.

The King * was a thoroughly vicious and disreputable old man. The reigning favourite was the vulgar and immoral Madame du Barry. The Austrian ambassador, the Comte de Mercy, who sent long and frequent dispatches to Maria Theresa, with all the news of Versailles, thus describes the French Court:

"It is almost impossible that Your Majesty should form a correct idea of the horrible confusion that reigns here. The throne is disgraced by the extensive and indecent influence of the favourite, and the wickedness of her partisans. Versailles is the abode of treachery, spite, and hatred."

The little Dauphine must have suffered much from home-sickness and loneliness during the first years of her married life.

The wickedness of the Court was a revelation to her innocent mind, for under her

* Louis XV.

mother's roof she had been carefully sheltered from all knowledge of vice. In the pretty childish letters she wrote home, she often reveals the heartache from which she suffered in those early days. "I hope my dear mamma will forgive me if I confess that I have moments of great depression, which I find hard to shake off," she writes to Maria Theresa; "it is no doubt owing to the utterly different life here, and to being away from all my dear ones."

Her young husband was neither prepossessing in manner nor appearance. Stout and clumsy in figure, awkward and shy in manner, reserved in his speech, and particularly boorish in his ways, he was not likely to win the affection of a pretty, sensitive girl like Marie Antoinette. In her letters home she writes kindly of him, and does full justice to his good nature. "M. le Dauphin speaks very little, is shy, and not at all demonstrative," she writes, "but he is good and kind to everybody." She used to call him *le meilleur enfant.*

But his awkward and *gauche* ways irritated her at every turn. The young couple had absolutely no tastes in common. The Dauphine loved society, pleasure, gossip, pretty clothes, fashionable people, and frivolous chatter.

The Dauphin hated and shunned society, disliked balls and parties, and was only happy when out hunting or indulging in his hobby for doing blacksmith's and locksmith's work, for which he had a real aptitude. For hours together he used to work in his forge on the top floor of the Palace, and would come downstairs and present himself to his wife with his hands all black and grimy.

In a letter to a friend the Dauphine writes: "My tastes are not those of the Dauphin, who cares only for hunting and for blacksmith's work. You will admit that I would not show to advantage in a forge."

The Dauphin was none too particular about his toilette, and his ideas about personal cleanliness were somewhat strange. He once ingenuously remarked: "C'est très drôle qu'on se lave si souvent les mains, tandis qu'on ne se lave jamais les pieds" ("It is very strange that people should wash their hands so often, when they never wash their feet).

Marie Antoinette was ultra-fastidious in her personal habits. She took daily baths—a most unusual thing in those days—and was scrupulously refined in all matters of the toilette, so the Dauphin's slovenly ways were a source of real vexation to her.

Louis had inherited many German tendencies from his mother, a Bavarian princess; and among these was a prodigious German appetite. This never failed him, even in the most critical moments of his life. It is true that meals were not then as frequent as in our days, there being only two in the day—dinner at two o'clock and supper at nine, with no "snacks" in between—but on these occasions the Dauphin performed astonishing feats in the way of eating. "*L'appétit vient en mangeant,*" and Louis might have said with *Le Grand Monarque*: "The first mouthful of hot soup opens the gates of my appetite."

His gross feeding was revolting to the refined instincts of Marie Antoinette—who herself was remarkably abstemious in her habits. Indeed, her extreme temperance with regard to eating and drinking was a matter of astonishment to the Court.

She breakfasted in her bedroom on a little chocolate and a roll; at dinner she partook of some chicken and a few biscuits soaked in water; at supper she took a little broth and some chicken; she never drank wine, and she rarely touched sweets. It is possible that her dazzling complexion was due to her moderate *régime.*

The clumsy *gaucherie* of the Dauphin amused Marie Antoinette, and she did not restrain herself from making fun of him amongst her friends. He was rather short-sighted, and a curious habit of his was sometimes to bundle right up against the person he was addressing. The courtiers used to call this trick "one of the Dauphin's frontal attacks."

No one, indeed, could have been less fitted to be the husband of Marie Antoinette than poor, clumsy, good-natured Louis. His loud "guffawing" laugh, his clumsy way of expressing himself, his enormous appetite, jarred every moment on his refined and *spirituelle* wife; and yet behind all this *gaucherie* there were sterling qualities.

Joseph of Austria formed a just estimate of him when he wrote: "The man is weak, but he is no fool. He has principles; he has judgment; but both body and mind are in a state of torpor. Though capable of carrying on a sensible conversation, he has no desire, no curiosity for knowledge. In short, the word 'Let there be light' has not yet been spoken. Matter is still in a chaotic state."

The Dauphin was no help whatever in steering his young wife through all the shoals and

pitfalls of Court life. Though he was fond and proud of her, he studiously kept aloof from her; for many years the two led absolutely separate lives, and it seemed as if the ice of reserve between them would never thaw. As time went on, they began to understand one another better; the husband became less reserved, and the wife more forbearing.

Madame du Barry made life very difficult for Marie Antoinette in those early days. In reality she was furiously jealous of the fresh beauty of the young bride. Knowing full well that her own looks were rapidly fading, and fearing that she might lose her favour with the King, she spoke sneeringly of the Dauphine as "*la petite rousse*" (the little red-haired thing), and never lost an opportunity of making mischief about her. Marie Antoinette, on her part, thought Madame du Barry "the most silly and impertinent creature imaginable," and found it hard to treat her with bare civility.

Mesdames de France—the elderly daughters of Louis XV and Marie Leczinska—must have been somewhat of a trial to the little bride, for they were soured, narrow-minded women, who had budded, blossomed, and withered in the vitiating atmosphere of Versailles, where

everything was artificial and insincere, if not flagrantly vicious.

Madame Adelaide, the eldest of the four, was strongly prejudiced against Austria, and was therefore ill disposed to receive her new niece with kindness.

"My aunt Adelaide frightens me a little," writes the Dauphine: "the more I see of her, the more I perceive that she has not forgiven me for coming here and taking away the position she used to have."

Madame Victoire echoed Madame Adelaide's opinions and prejudices. Madame Sophie, who was very plain, had a sharp tongue and a sour temper.

Marie Antoinette was valiant in her efforts to be kind and patient with these disagreeable and mischief-making old aunts, but the task was not an easy one.

During all those early years of loneliness and difficulties the Dauphine drowned her troubles in a feverish round of pleasure. She was lonely, she was neglected by her husband, she had many enemies; and she sought for consolation in all the amusements and frivolities at Court.

Excitement is often the stimulant of an aching heart. In her loneliness and un-

happiness the young Princess gave herself up body and soul to the pursuit of pleasure, and she can scarcely be blamed for this. She naturally shone in Society, and she enjoyed the incense that was freely offered to her youth and beauty. It has been well said that "she lived like a divinity in a cloud of incense that intoxicated her." She confesses to her mother her dissipation and her disinclination for serious things; and in writing to her sister, the Archduchess Marie Christine, she says: 'On s'amuse ici beaucoup, on danse, on joue . . . je ne lis rien, je ne fais rien de mes dix doigts, et cependant je suis occupée au point de ne savoir où prendre une minute" ("A great deal of amusement goes on here: we dance, we play . . . I don't read, I twiddle my ten fingers all day, and yet I seem to be so occupied as never to have a minute").

It was a deep sorrow to Marie Antoinette that she had no children. The instinct of motherhood was strong in her, and she had always been devoted to children. She loved to "mother" her little sister-in-law, Madame Elisabeth. "The little *farouche* Elisabeth is becoming quite good, and never lets go my hand," she writes in one of her letters. "If I had children, how I should make them

love me!" she writes to the Archduchess Marie Christine.

She went so far as to adopt a little peasant boy, Jacques Arnaud, and nothing made her more happy than to play and romp with the little fellow. She had him dressed in a white lace frock and a pink sash fringed with silver. The child took his meals with her, and she petted and spoiled him to any extent. Years afterwards Jacques Arnaud died fighting in the ranks of the Revolutionary armies!

The Dauphine realised that her childlessness was a reproach to her in France. "Give us heirs," the *poissardes* used to scream after her. She often touched on her sorrow when writing to her mother and sister, but always added that she must be resigned to the will of Heaven.

The etiquette of the French Court was another of Marie Antoinette's trials. It was in her nature to dislike ceremony and formalities. Quick and impatient, she acted on the impulse of the moment, and the tedious restrictions of Court etiquette fettered her spirit and annoyed her at every turn. Writing to her sister Marie Christine, she says: "The Court is more gloomy than gay, and the etiquette is most tiresome." Again she writes:

"The etiquette of the Court is extremely *gênante*, but the King wishes me to conform to it for dignity's sake, and I can quite see his point of view, but the etiquette of the bedchamber is really too odious."

Clara Tschudi, in her *Life of Marie Antoinette*, thus describes some of the tyrannical regulations that prevailed in the bedchamber: "Every detail in her private life, and the choice of her clothes, even the style of a ribbon bow, was determined by the rigid laws of etiquette. . . . If she (the Dauphine) asked for a glass of water, it was brought by a servant on a salver; but he did not present it to her, he gave it to the lady-in-waiting, who passed it to the maid-of-honour; and if one of Her Royal Highness's sisters-in-law was there, the glass was given to this princess, when it finally reached the thirsty Dauphine. Nothing was handed directly: handkerchief, gloves, anything that she required, was first laid on a salver, which was passed on from hand to hand. In this way, though surrounded by so many servants, the Dauphine was often but poorly attended to."

On one occasion, when a hitch occurred in the ceremony of handing the Princess her nightdress at her *coucher*, she was left

MARIE ANTOINETTE, DAUPHINE OF FRANCE.

barely covered and shivering from cold while the proper traditions were being observed. "Really this etiquette is simply unbearable!" murmured the exasperated sufferer.

The Comtesse de Noailles, the Dauphine's *gouvernante*, was a rigid stickler for etiquette. She was a worthy woman, and one whom every one respected, but she was conservative to the last degree, and the punctual observance of Court ceremonial was almost a sacred principle with her, so the Dauphine's indifference to these matters pained her sorely.

Marie Antoinette, among her own friends, could not refrain from making merry sometimes over her *gouvernante*, whom she nicknamed "Madame Etiquette."

On one occasion, when, in a mad donkey-race with her brother-in-law, she had tumbled off her donkey, she lay on the ground breathless with laughter, and shouted to her friends to "run and ask Madame Etiquette how a Queen of France ought to behave when thrown by a donkey."

. . . . .

At the time we are speaking of, Axel Fersen, the young Swede who had attracted the Dauphine's interest at the ball, was a youth of

eighteen. There was, indeed, something particularly attractive about him. The large steel-blue eyes, shaded by thick lashes, the firm, refined mouth, the serene expression of the face, the tall, slender figure, combined to make him the type of an ideal hero of romance.

His manners were the perfection of high breeding. He had a quiet dignity and reserve combined with a full measure of youthful spirits, and a keen sense of humour. The slight tinge of melancholy that pervaded his features added to the interesting *ensemble*; while from head to foot he was every inch an aristocrat.

He came from a most distinguished family, famous for their gifts of mind and body. It is claimed by some that the Fersens were descended from a branch of the Macpherson clan, and were therefore of Scotch extraction.

Axel's father, Field-Marshal Count Frederick Fersen, was one of the leading politicians in Sweden. He belonged to the political party of the "*Hats*," and was what we should now call a consistent Liberal, always identifying himself with the cause of the people. He thoroughly disapproved of the erratic and

unconstitutional measures of his King, Gustavus III, but though he opposed him in politics he was always a loyal subject, and scorned to enter into any plot or intrigue against his sovereign.

The mother of Axel Fersen was the Countess Hedwige de la Gardie, who came from a family of French extraction. She was a pretty *brunette*, and from her Fersen and his sisters inherited their beautifully marked eyebrows. The Fersens were indeed an extraordinarily handsome family.

Axel's three cousins, the daughters of Count Charles Fersen, were the reigning belles of the Court of Gustavus III, and were known as *The Three Graces*, while his sister, the Countess Sophie, was so beautiful that she inspired the King's brother with an ardent passion, which, for him unfortunately, was never returned.

At that time it was the custom for Swedish gentlemen to send their sons on the Continent to "finish their education," and a "Grand Tour" abroad was considered essential to the completion of a nobleman's education.

At the age of fifteen Axel Fersen was sent abroad under the care of a tutor. His Grand Tour was to last four years, during which

time he was to study military matters in the schools of Brunswick, Turin, and Strasbourg. The young Count kept a diary during his travels, and his records are most interesting and amusing.

In October 1771 he visited the great philosopher Voltaire at Ferney. He thus describes the famous savant:

"We were received at the time fixed, and we talked to him for two hours. He wore a scarlet waistcoat with old embroidered buttons, which no doubt his father and grandfather had worn. An old wig, uncurled, ancient slippers, woollen stockings, drawn up over his breeches, and an old dressing-gown, completed his 'get-up,' and it all harmonised with his wrinkled old face; but we were particularly struck by the beauty of his eyes and the animation of his looks. The *tout-ensemble* of the face has a very satirical expression."

His remarks upon the city of Bâle are interesting. He writes in his *Journal*:

"*Oct.* 17, 1771.

"At Bâle there are all sorts of extraordinary customs, and it is a most diverting place. For instance, the town clock is always an hour in advance of all other clocks. I am told this

arises from a circumstance which took place years ago, when a certain Mayor of Bâle, having been apprised of a plot that was being formed against him, put the town clock forward by an hour, and thus confounded the plans of the conspirators.

"Dancing is not allowed in Bâle, except when the master of the house plays the violin, or after one has been out in a sleigh.

"Driving is permitted, but only up till ten o'clock. The carriage must be quite plain, all of one colour, with no gilding—and no servants behind. It is forbidden to have any silk fringes, either inside the carriage or on the harness, when you go to church, and you must be in black and *en déshabille*. Diamonds, pearls, lace, and other ornaments of all kinds are forbidden. It is *de bon ton* not to go out of doors before five o'clock; then one can go out and see one's friends. One of my acquaintances invited me to come with him to '*L'Assemblée du Printemps*.'

"There he began by presenting me to his sister, and then she introduced me to the other members of this kind of club, which is composed entirely of young ladies. It surprised me very much to see these young *demoiselles* arrive all by themselves—with no

escort of any kind. At the club they play cards, or talk with any of the strangers or the young men of the town who have had the privilege of being admitted into their circle. They even go out alone for walks."

CHAPTER II

1774—1775

The winter season in Paris—Extracts from Fersen's *Journal*—His impressions of France—The Royal coterie—Monsieur—Madame—The Comte d'Artois—The Comtesse d'Artois—The Royal amateur troupe—Death of Louis XV—Accession of Louis XVI—Creutz's dispatch to the King of Sweden—Fersen in London—His presentation to George III and Queen Charlotte—A ball at Almack's—His return to Sweden.

It was in the beginning of 1774 that young Axel Fersen tasted for the first time the sweets of Paris. On New Year's Day he went to Versailles to pay his court to the King (Louis XV), after which he went with the Comte de Creutz to pay his respects to Madame du Barry. Society in Paris opened its arms to the handsome young Swedish Count. Invitations rained thick and fast upon him, and he entered fully into all the delights of a winter season in Paris.

In those days Paris was very much what she is now—the same beautiful, frothy, frivolous

city, so irresistible to the young, and with a charm possessed by no other capital in the world.

An Englishman visiting Paris at that time thus records his impressions of the gay Parisians :

" Everybody here dresses with a world of finery. Ribbons, laces, and looking-glasses are three things without which the French cannot live. During Lent every one runs to Church in the morning with great devotion. After dinner they run off to the Comedy with the same haste. . . . All Parisians are lovers of novelties. Every day they invent new fashions."

Axel Fersen's *Journal* shows how every day was filled up to the brim with social engagements :

" *Jan.* 3, 1774.

" I called upon the Spanish ambassador; the Comte de Creutz then took me to see the Comtesse de Brionne, who received us in her dressing-room.

" I thought her good-looking, although she is somewhat elderly; but she is tall, well made, with a pretty face, and very pleasant and bright. I was present at part of her toilette, and I was much entertained! After having

been powdered, she took a little silver knife, about a finger's length, and carefully scraped off the powder. Then one of her three waiting-women brought a large box, which she opened: this contained six jars of rouge; another little box was filled with a pomade which seemed to me black. The Countess took some of this on her finger and dabbed it on her face; it was the most beautiful rouge imaginable."

"*Jan.* 31.

"At three o'clock I went to Versailles.

"I stayed at the ball till a quarter to eight. Then I went home, changed, and at a quarter past nine I went to Madame d'Arville, who had invited me to supper the previous day. We were a party of five, and the supper was a very gay one."

"*Wednesday, Feb.* 2.

"I had to get up at eight o'clock in the morning to order a suit of clothes to be ready by midnight for the ball at the Palais-Royal. In the afternoon I paid calls on the Duchesse d'Arville, M. du Deffant, and the Comtesse de la Marck, who overwhelmed me with civilities. . . . It was a quarter past nine when I left the Comtesse de la Marck; then I went to de Geer, where Poniatowski also arrived. All

the evening I impatiently awaited my new suit, and I was just beginning to get really angry when it arrived. . . . I dressed at express speed, and hastened to the Palais-Royal. There I was much surprised to find all the ladies dressed as shepherdesses—in gowns of gauze and taffetas, while the men were in rich suits, elaborately embroidered. . . . There were only twenty ladies present, and the ball was not particularly lively; it only lasted six hours. . . . As I left I thought to myself that the French do not know how to amuse themselves. They have got the bad habit of always saying 'I am bored,' and that poisons all their pleasures."

It is not to be wondered at that there were so few ladies present at this particular ball, for the reputation of the Duc de Chartres was such that the Palais-Royal was by no means a desirable place for ladies.

On Shrove Tuesday Fersen went to another ball at Versailles. He thus describes it: "I arrived towards the end of the ball. Madame la Dauphine, Madame de Provence, Madame d'Artois, Madame de Lamballe, and two other ladies arrived, with M. le Dauphin, M. d'Artois, etc., all wearing costumes of the

period of Henri IV, which is the old French dress. . . . Some of them, especially M. le Dauphin and M. de Provence, danced very badly; the others were all right. The *coup d'œil* was charming."

The Dauphin was always being teased by his brothers about his dancing, and it was a source of real distress to him that he was such a poor dancer. He used to make valiant efforts to improve in this direction. In the privacy of his room he would practise his steps diligently for hours at a time. His mischievous brother, the Comte d'Artois, would occasionally hide himself behind a curtain to have the fun of watching the pirouettings of the poor Dauphin, who never succeeded in doing more than sliding heavily about the room and getting very hot and breathless.

During the early spring of 1774 Axel Fersen led the life of the ordinary fashionable Parisian. He rose late, dined at two o'clock, rode or drove out in the Park, went to the play at six o'clock, and supped between eight and nine o'clock in the evening. Balls and supper parties were of daily occurrence—even in the Lenten season. Fersen remarks in his *Journal* on the mildness of the Lenten *régime* in France:

"*Feb.* 20.

"The Comte de Creutz took me several times to the Marquis de Brancas' house, where every one is most kind to me. I have supped there several times, and on Friday, March 4, they gave a delightful little dance. Only five couples were there, and we danced from eight in the evening till six in the morning, with only an interval of one hour for supper. They often have these *soupers dansants* in Paris during Lent. Certainly Lent is not observed here half as strictly as in Italy, where any one daring to go to a dance at this time would be excommunicated."

The *petits soupers* after the play were a great feature of Parisian life in those days. There were many clever and charming hostesses to whose houses the *beau monde* flocked, and who had the art, so peculiar to Frenchwomen, of entertaining their guests in the true sense of the word.

It was with no visible effort, no forced pose, that the Parisian hostess kept her guests at her feet. She had the happy knack of drawing out the best in her guests, her wit was sharp enough to draw swords with the brightest intellect, she was gifted with supreme tact and

savoir-faire; and all these things, combined with a charming personality and an inimitable grace of manner, made her an ideal hostess.

The young Count was made welcome at the Court, and it was not long before he was admitted into the intimate circle of the Royal family. At that time the three royal brothers and their wives formed a happy little *coterie* at Versailles. The Comte de Provence (who bore the title of *Monsieur* after his brother's accession, and who became Louis XVIII in 1814), writes in his *Mémoires*:

"The three '*ménages*' were as one. The Dauphine succeeded in making us put etiquette completely aside in our private life.

"We visited each other without ceremony, we all ran about together in the grounds of Versailles, Trianon, Marly-Meudon, and Choisy; we ate fruit and we drank milk with the pleasure of schoolboys escaped from their masters. We spent the evenings in impromptu balls, in acting comedies, and in all sorts of games and amusements."

The Comte de Provence was by far the cleverest of the three brothers. He had a remarkable memory, of which he was very proud, and he was looked upon as a kind of walking encyclopædia at Court. He had

literary tastes, and aspired to be a patron of *les belles lettres*, but his *Mémoires* do not show any signs of real literary ability on his part. He was pompous and rather priggish in manner (his priggishness stands out conspicuously in the *Mémoires*), and he had a liking for pageantry and anything that savoured of pomp and ostentation.

Although he was as fat as a beer-barrel, and had a peculiarly clumsy gait, there was a certain dignity about him which was altogether lacking in Louis. For many years he looked upon himself as the heir to the throne, and it was a terrible blow to him when a son was born to Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette (in 1782). The frustration of all his cherished hopes embittered his whole life, and made him a soured and disappointed man. From that time he lost no opportunities of making mischief about his brother and sister-in-law, and working in every possible way against them.

His *Mémoires* mention a curious prediction relating to his own career at the time of the Dauphin's birth (in 1782). As he went to bed on that eventful day, a note awaited him in his room, which had been mysteriously delivered, no one knew how or when. It was

written in white ink on black paper, and it ran thus:

"Console thyself. I have just drawn the horoscope of the new-born child: he will not take the crown from thee; he will cease to live when his father will have ceased to reign. Another one will succeed Louis XVI—but none the less thou wilt be King of France one day. Woe to him who succeeds thee! Congratulate thyself thou hast no posterity: thy sons would be threatened by two great dangers, for thy family will drink to dregs the bitterest cup of destiny. Adieu! tremble for thy life if thou try to find me out.

"I am,

"DEATH!!!"

Strangely enough, this curious prediction was verified. The new-born Dauphin died in his childhood. Monsieur became King of France after Napoleon's abdication in 1814, and his brother Charles X, formerly the Comte d'Artois, was the last of that line of the Bourbons to reign in France.

The Comtesse de Provence—or *Madame*, as she became afterwards—was a princess of Savoy, the eldest daughter of the Prince of

Piedmont. She was a plain, uninteresting woman—stiff in manner, and a rigid observer of etiquette. She enjoyed country life, and was never happier than when in her country home near Versailles, where she interested herself in the farm and the garden. The story goes that she used to bring back to Versailles birds that she had netted in order to have a particular soup made of which she was very fond. This story does not present her in a very attractive light, and it is to be hoped there is no truth in it.

The " Prince Charming " of the family was, undoubtedly, the Comte d'Artois; and any one more unlike his two brothers could not possibly be imagined. Tall and slender in figure, handsome in face, graceful in carriage, and furnished with all the graces of a finished courtier, he was certainly by far the most attractive member of his family. Marie Antoinette was drawn to him from the first. His love of fun and mischief and his madcap ways appealed to her strongly, and the two became great friends and were constantly in each other's society.

Their *camaraderie* was very natural; both were young and bubbling over with high spirits, and they found each other excellent playfellows.

There was a side to Charles d'Artois that the Dauphine was too young and too innocent to know. She was not aware of all the low intrigues he indulged in, and of the disreputable scrapes he was always getting into. She did not know what a reputation he had for immorality. How could she guess the constructions that were put on her frank and very natural intimacy with so amusing a companion, bound to her by such close ties of kinship? By degrees her eyes were opened to his true character, and her admiration for him somewhat cooled.

The Comtesse d'Artois was a sister of the Comtesse de Provence. She was a quiet, insignificant little woman, who philosophically put up with the numberless "gallantries" of her very inconstant husband, and of whom it was said, "The day of her funeral will be the first on which she attracts any attention."

Acting was one of the favourite amusements of the young couples; but this had to be done strictly *in camera*, for Louis XV would never for one moment have tolerated the idea of Princes and Princesses of the Royal blood demeaning themselves so far as to appear upon a stage. So a little amateur troupe was formed in secret, composed of the

three sisters-in-law, the Comtes de Provence and d'Artois, and M. Campan, one of the Court officials. The Dauphin, who was no actor, usually represented the audience at these theatrical performances. A stage was improvised that could be removed at a moment's notice. At the sound of any approaching footsteps the stage and actors would disappear as if by magic. The "audience" generally went to sleep during the performances, and emitted loud snores, to the vast annoyance of Marie Antoinette; but if the actors happened to forget their parts, he would begin to enjoy himself, and became quite attentive.

The Comte de Provence was the best actor in the troupe. The two Savoy princesses said their parts with an atrocious foreign accent. The Comte d'Artois was too lazy to learn his part, and usually improvised. Marie Antoinette was not brilliant as an actress, but she learnt her part accurately, and, as a contemporary writer says, "She played with that bewitching charm which she knew how to cast over everything she undertook."

In April 1774 Louis XV was attacked by small-pox of the most virulent kind. It soon

became evident that his case was hopeless. The tortures he went through, physical and mental, were the tortures of hell. It was a terrible death-bed. No writer has described it more realistically than Carlyle in the wonderful first chapter of his *French Revolution*:

"But figure his thought, when Death is now clutching at his own heart-strings; unlooked for, inexorable! Yes, poor Louis, Death has found thee. No palace walls or life-guards, gorgeous tapestries or gilt buckram of stiffest ceremonial could keep him out; but he is here, here at thy very life-breath, and will extinguish it. Thou, whose whole existence hitherto was a chimera and scenic show, at length becomest a reality: sumptuous Versailles bursts asunder, like a dream, into void Immensity; Time is done, and all the scaffolding of Time falls wrecked with hideous clangour round thy soul; the pale Kingdoms yawn open; there must thou enter, naked, all unkinged, and await what is appointed thee! Unhappy man, there as thou turnest, in dull agony, on thy bed of weariness, what a thought is thine! Purgatory and Hell fire, now all too possible, in the prospect: in the retrospect—alas, what thing didst thou do that were not better undone; what mortal didst thou gener-

ously help; what sorrow hadst thou mercy on? . . . Miserable man! 'thou hast done evil as thou couldst,' thy whole existence seems one hideous abortion and mistake of Nature."

The agony of the dying monarch was prolonged till as late as the tenth of May. The ravages of the disease made the unhappy sufferer almost unrecognisable; the atmosphere of the sick-room was so pestilential that it almost meant certain death for any one to enter it. The Court watched and waited, and all prayed for the end to come. Carlyle says:

"This tenth of May falls into the loathsome sick-bed; but dull, unnoticed there; for they that look out of the windows are quite darkened; the cistern wheel moves discordant on its axis; Life, like a spent steed, is panting towards the goal. In their remote apartments, Dauphin and Dauphiness stand road-ready; all grooms and equerries booted and spurred, waiting for some signal to escape the house of pestilence. And hark! across the *Œil de Bœuf* *—what sound is that? Sound terrible and absolutely like thunder!

* An ante-chamber to the King's room—so called from its oval window.

It is the rush of the whole Court, rushing as in wager, to salute the new Sovereigns: 'Hail to your Majesties! The Dauphin and Dauphiness are King and Queen!' Overpowered with many emotions, the two fall on their knees together, and with streaming tears exclaim: 'O God! guide us! protect us! we are too young to reign!'"

The Comtesse de Noailles was the first person to salute the new King and Queen. Curtsying low, she requested their Majesties to deign to receive the princes and all the great officers of the Court who wished to do homage to their new sovereigns. The duties of kingship had to begin at once; and the two had to receive the homage of the princes before they had time to dry their tears. Marie Antoinette made her first appearance leaning on her husband's arm, still weeping.

Her tears were not for the dead king; they were for herself and her husband, and for their future, which she dimly foresaw would be beset with difficulties and dangers. In a line she scribbled off to her mother on that fateful day (May 10) she says:

"*Mon Dieu!* what is going to become of us? M. le Dauphin and I are simply terrified at the thought of reigning so young! Oh,

dearest mother, do not cease to advise your unhappy children ! "

In writing to her brother Joseph the following day she says :

" I have passed four happy years here, and now a new future full of shoals and dangers opens out before me : pray for me, and help me."

Two days after the King's death Fersen had to leave France and go to England, in accordance with the programme his father had carefully mapped out for him. After his departure from Paris, in May 1774, the Comte de Creutz sent the following letter to the King of Sweden :

" The young Comte de Fersen has just left for London. Of all the Swedes who have been here during my time, he has met with the best reception among *le grand monde.* He was extremely well received by the Royal family.

" No one could possibly have conducted himself in a more perfectly modest way. With his very striking appearance and his *esprit* he could not fail to have succeeded in Society, and he certainly has been a great success. I am sure your Majesty will be pleased with him; but what makes M. de Fersen worthy

of all favour is that he has a particularly noble and elevated mind."

A chance word here and there in his *Journal* shows that Fersen found the English somewhat *triste* and dull after the gay and lively Parisians.

He thus describes his presentation to King George III and Queen Charlotte :

"*May* 18, 1774.

"I went at noon with Baron Nolcken * to the Court. The rooms in the Palace are small and poorly furnished—nothing bespeaks the grandeur of royalty. . . . When the King was dressed, we entered his room, where there was an old bed with red velvet curtains—all blackened by smoke and shining with candle-grease. . . . The King is obliged to speak to every one. He goes the round of the Ministers, and when he came to Baron Nolcken I was presented to him. He spoke to me in a whisper—that is his habit. As his conversation is only limited to four or five subjects, he is afraid lest he should be overheard making the same remarks to everybody."

"*Thursday, May* 19.

"I was presented to the Queen, who is

* The Swedish ambassador.

most gracious and amiable, but she is not at all pretty. In the evening I was taken by Count —— to a ball at Almack's, which is got up by subscription every winter. . . . The ball was to have commenced at ten o'clock, but the gentlemen stayed at their clubs till half-past eleven. During all that time the ladies were kept waiting. They sat on chairs in the gallery, *en grande cérémonie*; one might have thought oneself in Church, they were all so quiet and serious—indeed, they hardly talked to each other!"

Fersen lodged in Suffolk Street during his four months' stay in London. He took part in all the social life of fashionable London, but the English capital was not much to his taste, and he was glad to return to Sweden at the beginning of 1775, after an absence of four years.

CHAPTER III

1775–1779

The Swedish Court—The fêtes at Stockholm—The King of Sweden—Fersen's return to France—The winter of 1778—Trianon—Marie Antoinette *chez elle*—The Duchesse de Polignac—The Princesse de Lamballe—The Queen's set—The birth of Madame—The growing attachment of the Queen for Fersen—His chivalrous love—The gossip of the Court—Fersen resolves to go to America—The Queen's grief—Count Creutz's despatch to Gustavus III.

FERSEN returned to Sweden in the beginning of 1775. Four years had made a great difference in him. He had left his home a raw boy of fifteen, knowing little of the world. He was now a grown man, with the finished manners of one who has travelled and been thrown into the best society in Europe.

The King of Sweden gave him a warm welcome, and Society received the handsome young Count with open arms.

There was no lack of gaiety at the Swedish Court, for this was the famous period known as the Gustavan Era, and the brilliancy of the

fêtes at Stockholm were renowned throughout Europe.

Gustavus III was a lover of France and all things French; he aimed at modelling his Court on that of Versailles, and he insisted on the French code of etiquette being observed. But the Court ceremonial at Stockholm had not the stiffness of that of Versailles: the King threw over it all his own peculiar charm and picturesqueness; to quote the words of a Swedish writer, "there was sunshine in it."

Gustavus III was well called "the royal charmer"; there was a magnetism about him which cast a halo about his path and round his *entourage*; when he was absent from Court everything seemed flat and insipid.

Gustavus was one of the most remarkable figures of the eighteenth century. Restless, volatile, of a romantic turn of mind, and with an exuberant imagination, his genius found its expression rather in the writing of plays and the planning of fêtes than in the more prosaic business of governing a kingdom. Theatricals and pageants of all sorts were a perfect passion with him; not only did he take part himself in the plays at Court, but he often insisted on being stage manager, and personally supervised the music, decorations, costumes, etc.

He was the writer of a number of plays, and many of them were of distinct literary merit. His style was influenced by the French classical school; his plots were for the most part founded on Swedish history, and were of a patriotic tendency. Even Count Frederick Fersen, who disapproved of his sovereign's craze for the drama, admitted that one of the King's plays "was not without genius, and that few kings nowadays would be able to write a better."

In the mediæval castle fortress of Gripsholm Gustavus built a theatre in the French style, which cost vast sums of money. Here, during the winter season, a troupe of actors played nearly every day.

At the romantic palace of Drottingholme, two miles from the capital, where the Court spent the summer, the King organised every year a series of fêtes. He had a positive genius for inventing pageants, tournaments, *tableaux*, etc. The idea of reviving the ancient jousts of chivalry fascinated him, and at one time he used to rise at three o'clock every morning and diligently practise tilting till noon, while the rest of the day he would spend in studying the laws of mediæval chivalry.

The tournaments were held in the market-place of Stockholm, and sometimes lasted two

or three days. They were faithful reproductions in every detail of the old jousts. Each knight rode into the field fully armed, and wearing his lady's colours. His esquire rode before him bearing a banner on which was worked the knight's heraldic device, while his page followed bearing his sword and lance. The King rode a magnificent charger gorgeously caparisoned; his suit of armour, of the finest workmanship, was encrusted with jewels. The nobles and gentry took their places according to rank, in the large amphitheatre built for the occasion, while the Queen and her ladies sat on a purple-covered dais.

It was not long before Axel Fersen was drawn into all the gaieties of the Court. In February 1776 a great bazaar was organised by the King at Stockholm in imitation of the fair of St. Germain. The members of the Royal family all took part in the fair, serving their highly-priced wares in quaint little booths. Dressed as an English jockey, and mounted on a splendid horse, young Fersen performed graceful feats of horsemanship on this occasion. Another time he and his beautiful sister took part in a pastoral play in which both the King and Queen * were acting.

* Sophia Magdalena.

Again we see him figuring in a brilliant tournament that lasted three days. Very likely he was present at a wonderful fête at Drottingholme in 1779, when *Amadis de Gaul* was played by the King and the members of the Court.

This, perhaps, was the most brilliant period in Swedish history, and yet the country was very far from being in a satisfactory condition. The King had alienated himself from his nobles ever since his famous *coup d'état* of 1772, when he overthrew their power and took the reins of government into his own hands. Since then he had been to all intents and purposes an autocrat, and there were many in the country, among them Count Frederick Fersen, who strongly disapproved of their sovereign's policy.

In the early years of his reign Gustavus had seriously devoted himself to the business of government, and he had introduced a number of salutary measures and reforms. But his was an erratic and unstable spirit, and his growing infatuation for the French Court led him to forsake his duties and to plunge into the most ill-advised and unmeasured extravagances. He acted upon the idea that a brilliant and luxurious Court would stimulate trade and

increase the general prosperity of the country, so he did not hesitate to expend enormous sums on fêtes, theatres, and entertainments of all kinds.

The method of spending money lavishly on sheer luxuries in order to stimulate trade has been proved by the laws of political economy to be a fallacious one. The King's spendthrift policy only served to empty the exchequer and to increase the general discontent. Gustavus had all the attributes of a thoroughly popular king, and yet he succeeded, by his injudicious policy, in making himself extremely unpopular.

He was a finished courtier, with the knack of always saying the right and graceful word; he was kind-hearted, of an easy-going temper; and, in spite of his predilection for all things French, he was an ardent patriot and lover of his country. In appearance he was of medium height, slight in figure, with a fresh, almost girlish complexion, and wonderful blue eyes that seemed to look through and through the person he addressed.

A slight depression in the forehead, caused by an accident at birth, made one side of his face quite different from the other. This peculiarity earned him the name of "The King

with two faces." There were several traits in his character that somewhat savoured of effeminacy. For instance, he took a keen interest in clothes, and especially in the toilettes of the ladies at Court, and with his own hands he would embroider scarves and waistbelts for them. He was highly nervous and excitable, his constitution was delicate, and he was liable to fainting-fits on the slightest provocation. Following the King's example, French fashions, etc., became the rage in Sweden, and it was *de rigueur* for every one of gentle birth to speak and write French with fluency.

For three years Axel Fersen led the futile life of a courtier in Sweden. He longed to do some soldiering, but his country was at peace just then, so in the spring of 1778 he resolved to seek service abroad. In August he went to Paris, and presented himself at Versailles, where he was very pleased with his reception.

He writes to his father on August 26:

"Last Tuesday I went to Versailles to be presented to the Royal family. The Queen, who is charming, said, on seeing me: 'Ah! here is an old acquaintance.' A great excitement prevailed at Court just then, for it had

recently been announced that an heir to the throne might at last be expected."

The Queen was overflowing with happiness, and looked more beautiful and gracious than ever.

She showed a marked interest in the young Swedish Count who had so favourably impressed her three years before. Writing to his father in September, he says :

" The Queen, the prettiest and most amiable princess whom I know, has had the goodness to make frequent inquiry for me ; she asked Creutz why I did not come to her card-parties on Sundays, and having been told that I did go, on a day when the reception did not take place, she made me a kind of apology."

In November he writes :

" The Queen continues to show me kindness. I often go to her card-parties, and every time she says a few friendly words to me. Some one having mentioned to her about my Swedish uniform, she expressed a great desire to see me in it ; so I am to go next Tuesday, not to the Court, but to the Queen's own apartments. She is the most amiable princess I know."

Fersen spent a gay and delightful winter in Paris that year (1778). He bought a fine

MARIE ANTOINETTE, QUEEN OF FRANCE.

(Reproduced by kind permission of Mrs. Gladstone, Parkstone, Dorset, from a pastel portrait in her possession.)

house in the rue de Matignon, and kept six horses in his stables. He often figured at Longchamps among *le beau monde*, and his equipage was quite up to the required standard of smartness at that ultra-fashionable resort.

He writes to his father in November 1778 :

" My stay here is more and more pleasant every day. I make fresh acquaintance each day, and I believe I shall be able to cultivate them all without any trouble. . . . All the people I knew during my first visit seem to be pleased to see me again. In fact, this is a charming place, and the only thing wanting to make me perfectly happy is the pleasure of seeing you, my dear father."

There were other young Swedish noblemen in Paris at the time, among them Fersen's friend Stedingk, and they all seem to have been very popular in Society.

Creutz writes to the King of Sweden : " All our Swedes are succeeding beyond measure. People find them cultured, amiable, and excellent company."

Fersen and Stedingk were specially favoured, for they were invited to attend the Queen's receptions at Trianon, and this privilege was only for the few.

Trianon was the special *sanctum* and retreat

of Marie Antoinette. There she was in her own atmosphere, for she had practically created the place, and the stamp of her personality was everywhere.

Louis XVI had presented the Villa to her as a New Year's gift in 1774. "Trianon has been always given to the favourites of the Kings of France, so it is yours by right" he had gallantly said to her.

The Queen was enchanted to have a retreat where she could escape from the odious etiquette and ceremonial of Versailles. Here she could at last have a *home* in the true sense of the word. She set to work at once in her energetic way to transform the stiff gardens into an "English garden," then very much *à la mode.*

An "English garden" was an enclosed piece of "landscape"—it was an attempt to imitate Nature—and it generally produced a most artificial result!

The laying out of the Trianon gardens was entrusted to a clever and well-known landscape gardener. A lake with islands, crossed by bridges, a rivulet, a hamlet, a farm, a mill, grottoes among the groves, green lawns and shady paths, all these were created at Trianon. Cedars from Lebanon and Virginia, red

beeches, and many kinds of rare trees were planted. A little white marble temple, dedicated to the god of love, was erected on one of the wooded islands. The Queen took a great pride and interest in her flowers, and in writing to her sister she often mentions her beautiful chrysanthemums and roses.

Marie Antoinette allowed herself the pleasure of entertaining her friends in an informal way at Trianon. All ceremony was dispensed with there. She poured out tea herself for her guests, the piano in the hall stood open for any one to play on, her visitors were at liberty to do whatever they liked. At Trianon the Queen could have the rare pleasure of enjoying the society of her friends in a natural way.

Those who had the privilege of chatting to Marie Antoinette in her sitting-room must have carried away a delightful impression of her. Here were all her treasures: the piano on which Mozart had played, her organ, and her harp. The walls were hung with portraits of her relations. A beautiful ebony and ivory table stood in the centre of the room, covered with priceless souvenirs of all sorts and fresh cut flowers in rare Chinese vases. The Queen generally sat by the carved marble chimney-

piece working at her tapestry, all her silks and wools arranged round her in different coloured little bags. On a small silver tray near at hand were her scissors and thimble, etc. As she talked to her friends she worked —for the Queen was very fond of needlework, and it was her habit never to sit with her hands idle. The happy ones who were admitted into the privacy of her boudoir must have been charmed to watch her deft fingers at work while she chatted to them in her bright animated way.

As Axel Fersen was received into the Queen's intimate circle, he soon became acquainted with the other *intimés* of Trianon.

The Queen's greatest friend at that time was the Duchesse de Polignac. She was an empty-headed "butterfly" sort of a woman, but very pretty and attractive. Like her mistress, she hated reading and all serious topics of conversation.

When the Queen once proposed to read aloud a tragedy of La Harpe's in her *salon*, the Duchesse threw up her hands in horror. "Oh! for pity's sake," she exclaimed, "spare me this cup!" Flighty and fast herself, her influence over the Queen was exceedingly bad.

The Duchesse's life was by no means without reproach. The plays acted in her house and the conversations in her *salon* were often unblushingly immoral.

But the Queen was drawn irresistibly to her flighty friend. "When I am with her I am no more Queen, I am myself," she used to say. She showered benefits and favours on the Polignac family to such an extent that their wealth became a positive scandal.

Mercy wrote to the Empress Maria Theresa in 1779: "During the last four years it is reckoned that the Polignac family have acquired about 500,000 *livres* out of the annual revenues, and this not for any particular merit, but from pure favouritism."

Madame de Polignac was charmingly pretty, and bewitched every one with her winning smiles and her art of saying sweet nothings. She affected a marked simplicity in her dress, and this only rendered her beauty more striking and *piquante*.

She never wore diamonds; and Madame Campan, a warm admirer of hers, attributed this to motives of modesty. "I have always believed," she writes, "that her sincere attachment for the Queen, as much as her love of simplicity, induced her to avoid everything

that might cause her to be thought a wealthy favourite."

The King did not at all approve of Madame de Polignac and her small set. "You are a good-for-nothing set, all of you!" he would laughingly say to them.

To the public Madame de Polignac was the evil genius of the Queen, and she became the most unpopular and execrated woman in France.

The King's beautiful kinswoman, the Princesse de Lamballe, *née* Marie Thérèse de Savoie-Carignan, was another familiar figure at the French Court. Her fresh and delicate beauty, her exquisite taste in dress, and her sad history made the young widowed Princess a most charming and interesting personality. Her wedded life had been a short and a melancholy one. She had been married at the age of seventeen to the Prince de Lamballe, the only son of the Duc de Penthièvre, and a year after their marriage the Prince had died from the effects of the wildest dissipations. After his death the young widow retired into a convent for a few months, and then went to live with her father-in-law, who was devoted to her.

The old Duc de Penthièvre represented the very best type of the old French *noblesse*.

He and his daughter-in-law led a happy and peaceful life at his country *château* at Rambouillet, occupying themselves in beneficent schemes for the poor on the estate.

When the Princess came out of her retirement and appeared at Court, her beauty caused a great sensation. Louis XV. became quite infatuated with his fair kinswoman, and rumour said at one time that she had every chance of becoming Queen of France. But nothing would have induced the Princess to marry the disreputable old King, for whom she could only feel contempt and disgust.

A warm friendship sprang up between the Princess and Marie Antoinette, and for some time Madame de Lamballe was the "reigning favourite" in the Queen's circle. When, later on, the Duchesse de Polignac appeared upon the scene, Marie Antoinette's affection for her "*chère Lamballe*" somewhat cooled, and for some time she dropped her in favour of her more brilliant new friend.

But the Princess remained faithful and devoted to the Queen through thick and thin, and though she was deeply wounded by her mistress's fickleness, she kept her own counsel, and never condescended to make any mischief about the matter.

Madame de Lamballe was not a clever woman; she was highly strung, ridiculously nervous, and rather empty-headed; but behind all her frivolity there were sterling qualities which made her a friend true as steel to the Queen in her days of trouble.

The elderly and gallant Baron de Besenval was a well-known figure in the Trianon circle. He was thoroughly versed in Court ways, and an acknowledged authority on all matters of etiquette. He thus advised a Duke who had been absent from the French Court for some time: "Wear a puce-coloured coat, a puce-coloured waistcoat and puce-coloured breeches, present yourself with plenty of confidence, and that is all you want to make a good impression." In a moment of madness he once went so far as to make a declaration of love to the Queen—to her infinite astonishment. "Rise, monsieur," she said, with the greatest dignity mingled with a little compassion for the infatuated old man. "The King shall ignore a wrong that would disgrace you for ever."

The Duc de Coigny, another *habitué* of Trianon, was the beau-ideal of a perfectly finished courtier. In the days of trouble he proved himself a true friend to the Royal family, and Fersen refers to him many times

in his correspondence. Coigny was one of the four gentlemen who were sent at Marie Antoinette's request to amuse her in her sick-room, after an attack of measles.

The time of convalescence was very tedious for the Queen, and the presence of these friends, who were all men of wit and *esprit*, served to while away the long hours. Of course the ladies-in-waiting were always in attendance, so there was nothing harmful in this freak of the Queen's; still, it was an ill-advised thing to do, and gave rise to a great deal of disagreeable gossip. People asked: "Who would be the four ladies sent to amuse the King if he were ill?"

The Duc de Guines, a well-known dandy, was of the Queen's set. Of him it was said that he possessed two pairs of breeches, one pair for sitting down at table and another for gliding about "like an umbrélla in its sheath."

The Comte de Vaudreuil was an *habitué* of Mme de Polignac's circle. Perhaps it was owing to his sinister-looking face, disfigured by small-pox, that the Queen could never conquer her aversion for him.

The feather-headed little Duc de Lauzun fondly imagined for some time that the Queen was in love with him, just because she had

been amused by his racy conversation. Presuming on his delusion, he once so offended the Queen that she sharply ordered him out of the room.

At noon, on December 20, 1778, Marie Antoinette's first child was born—the little Princess Marie Thérèse (Madame Royale).

There was the greatest excitement. The doors of the Queen's room were thrown open to the public, and crowds poured into the bedchamber, where all the Court was gathered. The air of the room became so stifling that the Queen fainted, and for some moments her life was in the greatest danger.

The King broke a pane of glass to let in the fresh air, and she soon revived. There was a general disappointment that a Dauphin had not been born, but the Queen was quite happy with her little daughter. Writing to the Empress Maria Theresa a few days afterwards, she says:

" I have not given him (the King) a Dauphin, but the poor little one who has arrived will be none the less dear to me; a son would not have belonged to me, she will always be with me. She will help me to live—will comfort me in my troubles—and we shall be happy together. I nearly died in bringing her into

the world. I think the cruel custom of letting the Queen's room be filled with people at such a time is going to be abolished."

After the Queen's recovery the gaieties at Court recommenced, and Axel Fersen took his part in them all. He was constantly in the Queen's society—at her card-parties, her *petits soupers*, etc. The attraction she had felt towards him from the first was now ripening into a deeper feeling. The sincerity of his manner, his tender and chivalrous respect to her, and his perfect breeding appealed to her strongly.

A French historian says: "He never sought to shine or please. He shone naturally. The perfect simplicity and dignity of his bearing distinguished him entirely from the other monkey-like, coquetting, and fickle courtiers. He brought to the French Court what was an almost unknown thing in those days—*naturalness*. At the risk of being thought ridiculous and old-fashioned, he cherished a true respect for women." Madame de Campan writes of him: "Fersen was a charmer, and he worshipped the Queen. He was young and charming, and he drew all hearts after him."

The ladies of the Court fussed over him and petted him, and called him "*le beau Fersen*."

He was invariably courteous to them, but he never made love to them, and they thought him rather cold and inscrutable. No woman save one was ever to influence Axel Fersen. The spring of 1779 revealed to him the wonderful discovery who *the one woman* was.

It was the Queen of France! There was tragedy, deep and bitter, in the discovery. The Queen could never be for him, and he could never be for the Queen. Yet that most mysterious of all laws, the law of attraction, had brought their two souls together, and he knew that she and no other would henceforth fill the deep springs of his life, that she would be the guiding star of his path and the inspiration of all that was best in him. It was *kismet!* Fate so ordered it that he could only worship her shrine at a distance—they must needs be ever apart; but he could offer her, at any rate, the undying devotion and service of a true knight.

He knew that his sentiments were reciprocated. The impulsive young Queen could ill conceal her feelings towards her friend, and though no words of love ever passed between them, her eyes spoke only too clearly the language of her heart.

At one of her charming little *réunions* at

Trianon the Queen took her harp and began to sing. Her eyes sought Fersen's as she sang from the Opera of *Dido*:

> "Ah! que je fus bien inspirée
> Quand je vous reçus dans ma cour."

The Court had duly observed the look. Tongues soon began to wag. People spoke of the extraordinary favour shown to the young Swede, and they whispered of the Queen's growing infatuation for him. The gossip soon grew into scandal. Faint rumours of it reached Fersen's ears, and his chivalrous soul revolted at the baseness of such vile insinuations. The mischievous chatter must be immediately stopped! The Queen must be spared such abominable gossip! There was only one course to take. He must leave the Court! And he must leave Her!

An excellent opportunity offered itself at exactly the right moment. The enthusiasm about the American war was just at its height, and numbers of French nobles were volunteering to go and help America in her fight for freedom.

Two armies under the command of Lafayette and Rochambeau were about to start. Fersen offered his services for the war, they were

gladly accepted, and he was appointed *aide-de-camp* to General Rochambeau.

The Queen was filled with sorrow at the coming departure of her friend. The thought of his long absence was almost unbearable to her, and her eyes filled with tears whenever she looked at him. The Court duly observed the tears.

Fersen continued in his attitude of respectful reserve. When a great lady rallied him playfully on forsaking his conquest, he answered gravely: "Madame, had I made a conquest, I should not forsake it. Unfortunately I go away without leaving any regrets."

In the April of that year (1779) the Comte de Creutz sent a confidential despatch to the King of Sweden.

"*April* 16, 1779.

"I must confide to Your Majesty that the young Count Fersen has been so well received by the Queen that several persons have taken umbrage. I own that I cannot help thinking she has a liking for him; I have seen indications of this too certain to be doubted. The young Count has behaved under these circumstances with admirable modesty and reserve, and his going to America is especially to be commended. By absenting himself he avoids

dangers of all kinds, but it evidently required firmness beyond his years to resist such an attraction.

"During the last days of his stay the Queen could not take her eyes off him, and as she looked they were full of tears. I entreat Your Majesty to keep the secret to yourself and Senator Fersen."

CHAPTER IV

1779–1783

The War of Independence—The departure of the French troops—The arrival at Newport—The inactivity of the French—The Conference at Hartford—General Washington's visit to Newport—A second Conference at Hartford—The French march to Phillipsburg—Junction with Washington—Junction with Lafayette—The siege of Yorktown—The surrender of Lord Cornwallis—Conference at Philadelphia—News of the Dauphin's birth—Fersen's illness—Rumours of peace—Harmony between allied armies—Return journey.

For many years the Colonies in America had been chafing under British rule and striving for a certain degree of independence. Each of the thirteen States had its own laws and Parliament, and each strongly resented the interference of the British Government in the management of its own affairs.

The English Government, with an extraordinary lack of perception, kept a tight and jealous hand over the Colonies, irritating them beyond measure by imposing distasteful taxes, appointing uncongenial governors, and generally interfering in matters which only con-

cerned the *internal* administration of the states. It is only surprising that the colonists put up with such a state of things for so long.

Matters, however, came to a crisis over an obnoxious tea tax—and in 1775 the thirteen States were all up in arms against the Mother Country.

Young America's struggle for independence met with warm sympathy in many quarters—especially in France, where the old antipathy to England was as bitter as ever. The valiant fight of the untrained volunteers of the States against the well-drilled armies of England roused a chivalrous admiration in the hearts of the French. When America called upon France to come to her aid in her fight for freedom she met with a hearty response. Numbers of young noblemen, many of whom were imbued by the modern doctrines—volunteered for service in America; the cause was looked upon as a sacred one, and it evoked a general enthusiasm all over the country.

Axel Fersen was delighted at the prospect of war. Writing to his father before his departure, he says:

"*March* 2, 1780.

"You see me, dear father, at the summit of my dearest hopes. There is to be a big

expedition of 12,000 men, but they say it will reach the number of 20,000. I have been appointed *aide-de-camp* to the General, who is M. de Rochambeau. . . . When I saw M. de Rochambeau he said a thousand nice things to me, and he kept me some time talking about you, dear father; he ended by saying he was charmed to have me with him."

Rochambeau's troops, which were to have sailed in April, were delayed at Brest by rough weather, and it was not till May that they started.

Fersen writes to his father from on board the *Jason*:

"*May* 16, 1780.

"I have only time to write two lines to you to say that I am well. I have not suffered from sea-sickness. Already we have had very rough weather, which has dismasted one of our ships. The wind is now in our favour, and I expect that we shall get to America in about forty days. We have just sighted a large ship in the distance, but I don't know whether she be friend or foe. I have no time to write more."

After various adventures the French fleet arrived, and disembarked at Newport, the

capital of Rhode Island, with an English squadron at their heels.

All was very new and delightful to the young Count. The fine bay, dotted with green islands, the picturesque town of Newport nestled on the hills, with its curious old watch-tower, the busy harbour with its shipping, had all the fascination of novelty for him.

A letter from General Washington was handed to Rochambeau on his arrival. It ran: "I hasten to impart to you the happiness I feel at the welcome news of your arrival, and in the name of the American army as well as my own I beg to present you with an assurance of our warmest sentiments for allies who have so generously come to our aid."

The French set to work at once to fortify Newport, and in a short time they occupied a strong position.

The summer and winter of 1780 had to be passed in wearisome inactivity, for a British squadron blocked the French army, and they were unable to get away from the island.

Fersen writes to his father:

"NEWPORT, *Sept.* 8, 1780.

"Nothing has happened since I last wrote. We have not yet been out of our island; we

are occupying ourselves in a most peaceful and orderly manner over making a camp. The works are not yet finished. It is going to be a most healthy and well-fortified camp. The strictest discipline is observed; nothing is taken from the inhabitants but what is scrupulously paid for; there has not yet been a single complaint against our men; this discipline is admirable, and causes much astonishment to the natives, who are accustomed to the plundering of the English and their own troops.

"The greatest harmony and confidence exist between our two nations, and were that enough to make the expedition a success, we should be quite sure of victory. . . . You know the French, my dear father, and the *gens de la Cour*, and you can judge of their despair, obliged as they are to spend all the winter in Newport, far from their mistresses and their pleasures in Paris—no suppers, no theatres, no balls. They are in utter despair, and the only thing to console them would be an order to advance immediately upon the enemy.

"We had tremendous heat here in August; I have never felt it so hot before, even in Italy.

"Now the air is much fresher; it is indeed a superb climate and a charming country.

"A week ago I went with the General on to the mainland, and I was the only one of his *aides-de-camp* to accompany him. We stayed away two days, and we saw the most beautiful country imaginable—all very well cultivated—and most charming scenery.

"The inhabitants seem to be prosperous, though by no means luxurious; the style of living they are contented with would in other countries be only tolerated by the poorer classes.

"They dress well, but simply; their manners and customs have not yet been spoiled by European artificiality. It is a country that ought to be most happy and prosperous if blessed with a long peace, and if the two parties that at present divide it do not cause it to suffer the same fate as Poland and so many other Republics.

"These two parties are called the *Whigs* and the *Tories*. The Whigs are all for liberty and independence. They consist chiefly of people of humble birth who have no possessions—in fact, the greater part of the country folk are Whigs. The Tories are all for the English, or, to be more correct, for peace, and they do not seem to care much about independence and liberty. They are all people of the better

class, and own most of the land in this country; many of them have got relations and property in England. . . . When the Whigs are the strongest they plunder the others as much as they can. It will be hard to extinguish the hatred that exists between the two parties; it will always be a source of trouble."

In October Fersen writes again to his father:

"Our position here (at Newport) is most disagreeable. We are vegetating close to the enemy, in the saddest and most trying inactivity and idleness. Owing to our small number, we are obliged to act on the defensive; we are of no use whatever to our allies; we cannot leave this island without exposing our fleet to the danger of being taken and destroyed; our fleet cannot move without giving us up to the enemy, who, with their superiority of men and ships, would of course attack us, and cut off our retreat to the Continent."

In September Rochambeau, accompanied by a small suite, sallied forth to meet the great General Washington at Hartford, for the purpose of conferring with him on the future plan of campaign.

GENERAL WASHINGTON.

Fersen writes to his father

"*Oct.* 16, 1780.

"A fortnight ago I went to Hartford, about forty miles from here, with M. de Rochambeau. We were a party of six—the Admiral, the chief engineer, the Viscomte de Rochambeau, his son, and the two *aides-de-camp*, of which I was one.

"At Hartford there was a Conference with General Washington. M. de Rochambeau sent me on in advance to announce his arrival, and I had time to study man, the most famous of our times. His handsome face is gentle and honest, and pictures his moral qualities; he looks like a hero; he is very cold, and speaks little, but is courteous and nice. There is an expression of sadness in his face which does not mis-become him, and makes him interesting."

The French General and his suite were received with full military honours at Hartford. Washington writes in his *Journal*:

"Thursday night the Conference was concluded. Friday saw the French officers start on their return to Newport, the Government guards again in martial array, escorting the distinguished guests to the river bank, while thirteen guns fired."

In the spring of 1781 General Washington paid a flying visit to Newport, where he was received with every mark of honour. The French troops formed a line three deep along streets as he made his way to Rochambeau's house. At night the town was illuminated, and if there were any citizens too poor to buy lights for this purpose, candles were provided gratis by the Town Council, for every house was expected to show a light on that occasion. There was a torchlight procession at night, headed by thirty little boys; and Washington, with his usual courtesy, before entering his house, stopped to thank the boys for their welcome.

The following evening Rochambeau gave a ball in honour of his illustrious guest, and while Washington danced with one of the leading belles of Newport, the French officers took the instruments from the musicians and themselves played dance music for the great hero.

A second Conference between the French and American Generals took place in May 1781, when it was decided that, after the arrival of fresh reinforcements from France, the French army should unite with the American army, and proceed to the siege of Yorktown, then held by Lord Cornwallis.

Fersen was delighted at the prospect of action, for he had begun to be very weary of doing nothing at Newport. "We have been for too long in a shameful inaction," he writes to his father. He confesses to finding his Chief somewhat *difficile*. "I am beginning to get rather tired of M. de Rochambeau," he writes. "He shows me esteem, and I am very sensible of it, but his manner is often very disagreeable and even insulting."

At the beginning of June he writes a jubilant letter home:

"At last we are off! In eight or ten days the army will be marching! This is the result of the conference between the two Generals. I hope we shall now see some active service, and that we are not leaving Newport just to encamp in another little town. . . . The whole army is enchanted at going."

The French army, numbering 5,000 men, left Newport on June 12. After some heavy marching in very hot weather, in which they suffered a good many privations, they found Washington's army at Phillipsburg. The long-hoped-for junction was at last accomplished, and Washington wrote the following letter of thanks to General Rochambeau: "The Commander-in-Chief embraces the earliest

opportunity of expressing his thanks to His Excellency the Comte de Rochambeau for the unremitting zeal with which he has prosecuted his march, in order to effect the long-wished-for junction between the French and American forces."

After various reconnaissances at Phillipsburg, the combined armies marched to Philadelphia, where they filed past the Congress.

Fersen writes : " The army marched through the town, and was greatly admired by all the inhabitants, who had never seen so large a number in uniform and arms, and so well disciplined."

Leaving Philadelphia, they marched to Williamsburg, where they joined Lafayette's army. The three allied forces then proceeded to invest Yorktown, and by September 29 Lord Cornwallis and his army found themselves entirely surrounded.

The siege was conducted with great military skill, and perfect harmony existed between the allies. Washington testifies to this in a letter written to Congress on October 12, 1781 : " I cannot but acknowledge the infinite obligations I am under to His Excellency the Comte de Rochambeau, M. de St. Simon, and the other general officers, and indeed the

officers of every denomination in the French army, for the assistance which they afford me. The experience of these gentlemen in the business before us is of the utmost advantage in the present operations, and I am sensible it must give the Congress the highest pleasure to know that the greatest harmony prevails between the two armies."

The French fully appreciated the greatness of General Washington, and a member of the expedition writes of him: "I need not mention the *sang-froid* of General Washington—it is well known—but this great man is a thousand times more noble and splendid at the head of his army than at any other time."

The siege of Yorktown was of only a short duration, for, realising the hopelessness of his position, Lord Cornwallis surrendered on October 19.

The capitulation was a mournful ceremony, and is well described in a military journal of the period:

"At about twelve o'clock the combined army was arranged and drawn up into two lines extending more than a mile in length. The Americans were drawn up in a line on the right side of the road, and the French occupied the left. At the head of the former the great

American, mounted on his noble courser, took his station, attended by his *aides-de-camp*. At the head of the latter was posted the excellent Count Rochambeau and his suite. It was about two o'clock when the captive army advanced through the line formed for their reception. Every eye was prepared to gaze on Lord Cornwallis . . . but he disappointed our anxious expectations, and pretending indisposition, he made General O'Hara his substitute as the leader of his army. This officer was followed by the conquered troops in slow and solemn step, with shouldered arms, colours cased, and drums beating a British march. Having arrived at the head of the line, General O'Hara, elegantly mounted, advanced to His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief, and taking off his hat, apologised for the non-appearance of Lord Cornwallis. With his usual dignity and politeness His Excellency pointed to Major-General Lincoln for directions, by whom the British army was conducted into a spacious field, where it was intended they should ground their arms."

The surrender of Yorktown was one of the most brilliant and decisive victories for the American arms, and it contributed very largely to the subsequent cessation of the war.

INACTION AT WILLIAMSBURG

After the siege there followed another period of inaction for the French, and many of the officers returned to France, where they were acclaimed as heroes. Fersen writes:

"*October* 23, 1781.

"We are going to stay in winter quarters near Williamsburg, which is an ugly little town—more like a village. . . . All our young Colonels *de la Cour* are leaving to spend the winter in Paris. Some will return, others will stay there, and it will surprise them a good deal if they are not made brigadiers for having been at the siege of Yorktown. They think they have done the most splendid thing in the world. As for me, I shall stay here: I have no reason for going to Paris except my own pleasure and amusement; these must be sacrificed."

During the period of inaction at Williamsburg Fersen and his friend, the Chevalier de Luzerne, took the opportunity of making several excursions into the neighbouring country, which he graphically describes in his letters home.

In July 1782 Fersen was present at another Conference between Washington and Rochambeau which took place in Philadelphia. It

was there the news came from France that a Dauphin had been born. Great were the rejoicings at the French Embassy, and the happy event was celebrated by a concert, a ball, fireworks, and a large dinner-party.

Fersen, too, must have rejoiced in the Queen's happiness, and possibly his thoughts went back to that cold December morning, four years ago, when there was such an excitement over the birth of little *Madame.* Fersen's Northern constitution found the heat of an American summer very trying, and in the August of that year (1782) he fell seriously ill. He was tenderly nursed by his friend the Chevalier de Luzerne, "who," he says, "overwhelmed me with kindness and care."

That autumn a general belief prevailed that peace was soon at hand.

Fersen was as pleased at the prospect of going home as he had been at the prospect of going abroad. He writes to his father in August 1782 :

"From the news which we have from England (for as yet we have none from France) it appears that peace is near. . . . This idea causes universal joy, and it gives me pleasure which I cannot express."

The prospect of peace soon became a certainty. In October Fersen writes:

"The last time I had the honour of writing to you, my dear father, was in August. Since then we have been perpetually on the move, and I have had no opportunity of writing to you my news. Our army has passed the Delaware, and we are now encamped about eleven miles from the Hudson River, and about twenty-four miles from the island of New York. There is every reason to believe that we shall finish the campaign here, and leave for our winter quarters. . . . Although we have not seen the enemy, we have had a very rough time, and have suffered greatly from the heat. Now it is beginning to get extremely cold.

"I have stood all the changes wonderfully well. This year I have a tent of my own, also a mattress; but I am not well off for blankets, and at night I have to wrap myself up in my big cloak."

In December 1782 a part of the French army embarked at Boston. Rochambeau says in his *Mémoires* that they parted with the universal benedictions of their allies in the thirteen States. He congratulates himself on the fact that during the course of three

campaigns not a blow had been struck and not a quarrel had taken place between the French and American soldiers!

A deputation of Quakers waited on the French General before his departure.

"General," they said, "we have not come to pay thee this visit because of thy military talents, for we care not about those things which concern warfare. But thou art a true friend to mankind, and thine army lives in a state of perfect order and discipline. Therefore are we come to offer thee our respects."

Fersen embarked on *The Brave*. The journey was long and tedious, and the French fleet met with many adventures on the way.

In February 1783 Fersen wrote to his father from Porto Cabello (in the Leeward Islands):

"I am perfectly well. The journey has been long and dull and tiresome, but it has affected me more mentally than physically.

"It was awful to be shut up on board with forty-five people in the same room, and occupation was impossible. . . . We have not many sick among us.

"The heat is very great, but I stand it pretty well, and I still wear a cloth suit lined with wool, while all the others are in linen.

My eyes are rather bad, which I put down to the glare of the sun on the white houses. I have begun to smoke again, and it suits me all right."

The discomforts of the long and trying sea journey seemed insignificant to Axel Fersen when the great joy of returning to France and to the Queen lay before him.

CHAPTER V

1784–1788

Fersen's return to Versailles—He joins the King of Sweden on his travels—Visits to Pisa and Florence—Meeting with the Emperor Joseph—The Count of Albany—Rome—Audience with Pius VI—Visit to Naples—King of Sweden's visit to Versailles—The fêtes at Trianon—Projected marriage between Fersen and Mlle Necker—The discontent in Sweden—The Assembly of the Notables—Gustavus makes war on Russia—The mutiny of Anjala—The King rouses the Dalesmen—March to Gothenburg—The siege of Gothenburg—Intervention of England—Fersen's mission in Paris—The elections for the States-general—The severe winter of 1788–9—The change in Marie Antoinette—The Dauphin's sickness—Fersen's devotion to the Queen.

IMMEDIATELY after his arrival in France Fersen presented himself at Versailles. An absence of three years had not lessened his devotion to the Queen. The thought of her had been ever with him, although he had neither heard from nor of her. Time had wrought changes in them both. Illness and the hot American climate had made Fersen look ten years older.

Madame de Boigne says: "He went to America and stayed there for two years, during which time he was so ill that he returned to Versailles ten years older in appearance, and having almost entirely lost his good looks." Madame de Boigne was given to exaggeration, and this last statement may be taken with reserve, for many years after this period Fersen is described as being "extremely handsome."

The Queen, too, had changed, for she had gone through trouble. The sordid affair of the Diamond Necklace, the knowledge of her growing unpopularity, had left their marks, and there were now lines of care on her beautiful face.

The Count received, as ever, a warm welcome at the French Court. He and his fellow officers who had returned covered with laurels from America were fêted and made much of in Society.

The King of Sweden wrote to Louis XVI asking him to give young Fersen the colonelcy of the Royal Suédois Regiment.

The Queen herself wrote in reply: "The recommendation that you have made to the King has been received as it ought to be, coming from you, and in favour of so good a

subject. His father * is not forgotten here; the services which he rendered and his good reputation have been renewed by the son, who has greatly distinguished himself in the American war by his character and his many good qualities. He has gained the esteem and affection of all who have had the opportunity of knowing him. . . . I hope that without delay he will be provided with a regiment." In due course the post was obtained, with a pension of 20,000 *livres*. He was also decorated with the Order of Merit.

Fersen did not remain long at the French Court.

The King of Sweden had been ordered by his medical advisers to winter abroad that year, and in September Fersen received a summons to join his sovereign at Nuremberg, and to accompany him on his European tour.

Gustavus set forth on his travels with a cortège of twelve brilliant young Swedish cavaliers—all specially fitted by their rank, their gifts, and their breeding to be his *compagnons de voyage*.

The tour was an extensive one. In October they visited Verona, where, in the great amphitheatre, they witnessed a wild-beast fight.

*Count Frederick Fersen.

Early in November they proceeded to Pisa, where a course of baths had been prescribed for the King. After a fortnight's stay in the quaint old city they removed to Florence, and there they came in for an exceptionally severe bout of cold weather. "Winter has had the incivility of becoming our travelling companion, uninvited," writes the King to the Comte de Creutz.

A very pleasant month was spent in Florence, and Gustavus, who had a real love for the arts, revelled in all the picture galleries of that wonderful city.

The Emperor Joseph II of Austria was also travelling about Europe *en touriste* at this time, and at Florence the two monarchs met. Joseph, who was always unconventional in his ways, paid his first call on the Swedish King so early in the morning that he found His Majesty in bed; but this by no means disconcerted the Emperor, and he enjoyed an hour's pleasant chat by the King's bedside. The two monarchs, both men of exceptional gifts and extremely original character, do not appear to have been prepossessed with each other, and Joseph went away with the impression that Gustavus was a conceited fop.

The King of Sweden also made the acquaint-

ance of the last of the Stuarts—Prince Charles Edward—who was living in Florence at that time under the title of the Count of Albany. He who had been "the bonnie Prince Charlie," and the darling of the Scotch nation, was now a pitiful-looking old man, broken down by disappointment and sorrow. His wife had deserted him, and in his wretchedness he had taken to drink; though Gustavus assured Marie Antoinette afterwards that at Florence he had never seen him otherwise than "perfectly sober and sensible."

The King felt a deep compassion for the outcast Prince, and his chivalrous pity moved him to grant him a pension of £500.

"Count Haga" and his suite arrived in Rome on Christmas Eve 1783. It had been the King's dearest wish to visit the Eternal City.

"Here I am at last," he writes to Creutz, "at the capital of the ancient world, the city of Augustus, Trajan, and the Antonines, the birthplace of so many great men, which offers such a varied spectacle to the philosopher, the statesman, and the man of letters."

Two days after his arrival the King had an audience with the Pope, Pius VI. This was a remarkable occasion, being the first time the

Holy Father had formally received a Protestant sovereign in audience.

The Roman Catholic faith appealed strongly to the mystic and imaginative nature of Gustavus III and he was much attracted by the gentle, persuasive old man, who spoke to him with such deference and courtesy. The Pope was aware of the Swedish King's sympathy, knowing that he had built, at his own expense, a church for his Catholic subjects in Stockholm. Pius VI courteously promised in return to restore the Lutheran church in Rome, which had fallen into disrepair.

Fersen and the other members of the King's suite were present at this famous interview, all wearing the Swedish national uniform.

One of the Swedes thus describes the scene: "We formed a circle round the Holy Father, who spoke somewhat incorrect French with great ease and fluency. His manner, without being at all imposing, was nevertheless indescribably noble. . . . We were with him about half an hour, and it was Senator Sparre who murdered the King's French on our behalf. On taking leave, the Pope himself conducted us to the door. In fine, he had the air of *un très-grand seigneur*, and there was certainly nothing of the monk about him."

Gustavus ordered a picture to be painted of his interview with Pius VI. It was a curious sight to see the Protestant sovereign of Sweden and the agnostic ruler of Austria attending High Mass at St. Peter's during the visit to Rome. "Both of us," writes Gustavus to a friend, "were to be seen side by side on our knees before St. Peter's altar, and all the world has been laying wagers ever since as to which of the twain is the more Catholic. As to that, I believe we are both about equally Catholic, but I am quite sure that I am the more apostolic, for I believe in the tenets of the Council of Upsala, while he believes in nothing at all."

The Swedish King, always strenuous, was a most indefatigable tourist, and was bent on seeing all the sights of Rome. He ascended the cupola of St. Peter's, and even inscribed his name, in true tourist fashion, on the ball which supports the Cross! He spent his days visiting the churches, picture galleries, and all places of interest; he purchased many works of art to adorn the galleries of Stockholm and Gripsholm.

Gustavus found Roman society extremely dull and stiff, and he spent most of his evenings with the French ambassador, Cardinal Bernis,

" whose conversation," he said, " was a healing balsam which more than compensated him for the dulness of the Roman *conversazioni.*"

At the end of January " Count Haga" and suite paid a visit to the Court of Naples.

Here Maria Carolina, the sister of Marie Antoinette, reigned as Queen-Consort, and she and her pleasure-loving husband exerted themselves in every way to make their guests happy.

Every day some fête or excursion was arranged, and Gustavus was delighted with his visit. " I am charmed with the Queen of Naples," he writes; " she grows upon me. Nobody could be more attentive or obliging." During the Carnival the two Kings indulged in the wildest romps, and enjoyed themselves like schoolboys. After a delightful *séjour* at Naples the Swedish party returned to Rome, where the King threw himself with all his usual vigour into sight-seeing and study in the art galleries.

While they were in Rome a polite invitation came from the Queen of France. " If, as I hope," her letter ran, " your Majesty's travels extend as far as Versailles, you may be assured of a warm welcome there."

Gustavus was only too pleased to accept

the Queen's invitation, and to Fersen also the prospect was delightful.

They arrived in Paris on June 7, 1784, and drove straight to the house of the Swedish ambassador, Baron de Staël, in the rue du Bac.

Gustavus was fond of giving surprises, so almost directly after his arrival he set off for Versailles, where he presented himself unannounced.

The Court was thrown into great confusion by the unexpected and sudden arrival of the Swedish King. Louis XVI was out hunting at Rambouillet, and when a courier brought him the news of the King's arrival he rode back in all haste to Versailles. Finding none of his valets ready to receive him, he hastily made his own toilette, and not very successfully, for he presented himself before his guest with his coat all awry, and wearing an odd pair of shoes of different colours!

The Queen gave him a scolding afterwards for his ridiculous appearance. "Is this the idea you wish to give the King of our fashions?" she said angrily.

Gustavus seemed to delight in paying his friends surprise visits. One day he presented himself uninvited at Trianon. The Queen

VERSAILLES.

was vexed, and told Mme Campan before the King to go and find out if there were a proper dinner to give His Majesty.

Gustavus hastened to assure her that the ordinary dinner would amply suffice for him. Mme Campan inwardly chuckled over the incident, and confessed to the Queen afterwards that " it reminded her of the cutlets on the gridiron and the omelette which in families of humble circumstances had to piece out short commons."

" You ought to have seen," said the Queen, " that I was giving the King of Sweden a lesson for his presumption."

A certain brusqueness about Gustavus prejudiced the Queen against him, and she treated him with marked coldness for some time. He was quick to perceive this, and revenged himself by making some brutally frank remarks to her. One day, at a ball, he went up to the Queen, who was not dancing, and said, " Was your Majesty fond of dancing in her youth ? " " Yes, Monsieur le Comte, and I am even fond of it now," was the cold reply. On another occasion the Queen and Mme de la Rochelambert were singing a duet together. When she asked the King afterwards how he liked it, he replied : " Ah, Madame ! how could

one help liking it when one hears Madame de la Rochelambert ! "

Towards the end of his visit the Queen and her guest got to understand each other better. In July she gave a wonderful fête at Trianon in his honour. A play was part of the programme, and Gustavus was enchanted with the Queen's charming little theatre, with its profusion of gilding, the curtains of blue silk, the chairs of blue velvet, and the beautiful allegorical paintings on the ceiling.

The play was followed by an *al fresco* supper in the groves of Trianon. The ladies flitted about in soft white gowns, and the Queen herself helped to wait on her guests. The gardens were illuminated, the twinkling lights were reflected on the lake, the scent of the flowers perfumed the soft evening air.

" It was a fairy scene," remarked Gustavus.

The Swedish King was as strenuous in Paris as he had been in Rome, and Fersen had to be at his constant beck and call.

By day he rushed about sight-seeing, at night he always went to the play; and the theatres in Paris found it hard work to produce enough fresh plays for him, as he often went to two or three plays in one evening !

About this time a marriage between Axel

Fersen and Necker's brilliant daughter was " in the wind." She was not the first young lady who had been suggested to him as a desirable match. Three years before, his father had been anxious for him to marry Mlle Leigel, the daughter of a Swedish nobleman who had settled in England.

Fersen had left for America leaving matters in an indefinite state, and during his absence the young lady had married Lord West.

Axel Fersen was a very desirable *parti* from every point of view at this time. His high birth and breeding, his handsome looks, his ample means, and the distinction he had acquired in the American war—all combined to make him the very type of a *preux chevalier.*

Germaine Necker, the brilliant and fascinating daughter of the Minister of Finance, was suggested as a most suitable bride for the young Swedish Count. She was rich, and though somewhat plain in looks, being moulded on rather a large scale, the marvellous intelligence and vivacity of her nature so lit up her face as to render it almost beautiful.

Fersen was but a lukewarm suitor for her hand, and he was delighted to hear of her betrothal to his friend Baron de Staël, the Swedish ambassador, who had perseveringly

wooed her for the last five years. He writes to his father on the subject:

"M. Necker has at last consented to give him * his daughter. I am delighted for M. de Staël's sake. He had many and powerful rivals, among them Mr. Pitt, the Prime Minister of England; but the young lady has chosen M. de Staël. I saw her only a few days ago: she is not good-looking—on the contrary—but she has *esprit*, she is gay and good-natured; she has been well brought up, and is extremely gifted."

Again he writes:

"You will have seen already that the idea which I had concerning Mlle Necker could not have come to anything . . . on account of my friend Staël, whom this marriage will suit perfectly, much better than it would suit me.

"I never thought of it except to please you, my dear father, and I am not at all sorry it cannot be."

There was never to be a wife for Axel Fersen.

. . . .

In August 1784 Gustavus tore himself away from the French Court, and Fersen re-

* Staël.

turned with him to Sweden, where he remained on and off for the next four years.

Agitation and discontent were seething among all classes in Sweden. The King's dangerous mania for theatricals and fêtes was making him most unpopular. The building of an Opera House in Stockholm, a new theatre in the Palace at Gripsholm, the pay of a French troupe of actors, and a continual series of fêtes during the winter seasons had seriously drained the national exchequer, and in consequence the country was in a miserable condition. A contemporary writer says: "The much increased luxury and expenses of the present Court cause the daily wants of the people to be much greater than in the times of the former kings."

Fersen's regimental duties in France obliged him to pay flying visits there from time to time. In the spring of 1787 he went to Versailles bearing a letter from Gustavus to Louis XVI.

The day he went to Court happened to be the last day's sitting of the Assembly of the Notables. This Council, composed of men occupying leading positions in France, had been brought together to discuss the grievous state of finances and to find some remedy for the existing serious state of affairs. The sug-

gestions laid before the Assembly by Calonne, the Finance Minister, were, however, violently opposed, and the Council dissolved without having done any good. Fersen writes to his father:

"*May* 25, 1787.

"I went to pay my court at Versailles. The sitting of the Notables was closed on the very day I went there. I am glad to have witnessed the ceremony; it was very imposing, and it probably will not occur again in our time.

"The only results of the Assembly of the Notables are great reforms in the households of the princes. . . . The Comte d'Artois has already returned 400,000 *livres* to the King out of the allowance for his household.

"The reduction in the Queen's stables amounts to 100,000 crowns—in short, it seems that a firm resolution to correct abuses so far as possible has been taken."

Fersen's pension was at this time reduced to 13,000 *livres*, and economies of this kind were made in many cases after the Assembly of the Notables.

In the summer of 1788 the internal dissensions in Sweden were so threatening that the King decided war would be the only means

of uniting the kingdom. War not unfrequently serves as an expedient for pulling together a divided country.

Gustavus—on his own initiative, and without consulting his Diet—embarked in the most crazy way on a war with Russia. He hired a few Finns (dressed as Russians) to commit depredations in the Swedish camp, and then he sent an extravagant ultimatum to the Empress Catherine of Russia, bidding her restore certain territories to Sweden. This rash and high-handed proceeding irritated the country beyond measure.

It was thought that the King had gone a little too far, and the generals of his army refused to take part in this absurd expedition. They issued a manifesto to the army at Anjala declaring the reasons for their mutiny; they disbanded their regiments, and concluded on their own account a truce with the Empress Catherine.

The King found himself in Finland practically deserted by all his troops. Fersen was with him at this critical juncture, but there are no records of his experiences, as unfortunately his *Journal* written between 1780 and 1791 was lost in the French Revolution.

The King, desperate though his situation

was, still hoped to extricate himself from his perilous position. "'Tis for feeble souls to complain," he said to his faithful adherent General Armfelt, who was in the depths of despair; "the strong conceal their misfortunes in their heart of hearts while they seek to repair them." His was indeed an ever-sanguine spirit. Armfelt took the blackest view of the state of things. "The King," he wrote, "is on the brink of destruction. All who wish him well agree that he has no other alternative but to cast himself into the arms of the nation, and frankly admit that he has made a mistake."

To add to the King's troubles, news came in August that the Danes had invaded Sweden at the instigation of Catherine of Russia, and were laying siege to Gothenburg, the second most important city in the kingdom! Here was a position for Gustavus to find himself in! His country invaded, his army in a state of mutiny, his nobles all against him, and he, the King, practically alone, and estranged from his people.

In the Danish invasion, however, Gustavus was shrewd enough to foresee his salvation. "We are saved!" he exclaimed on hearing the news.

Armfelt thought his sovereign must be mad. "I thought that despair and misfortune had turned his head," he writes, "but events were to show that he was wiser than I."

The King indeed perceived that the Danish invasion would rally his people together, and justify his departure from Finland without the appearance of flight. He would thus have the satisfaction of saving his dignity in the eyes of his foe—the malicious Catherine of Russia.

He left the camp in Finland at dead of night, hurried back to Stockholm, and then made his way, accompanied by only four attendants, to his ancient and loyal province of Dalecarlia.

The Dalesmen are a rough, simple people, accustomed to a life of incessant toil among the mines. The rigorous climate and the hard fare to which they are accustomed has always made them a hardy, brave, self-reliant race, and Gustavus knew that he could count on them in his hour of need. Had not they nobly responded two hundred and fifty years before to the appeal of his great ancestor, Gustavus Vasa?

The King found no difficulty in rousing the patriotism of the sturdy peasants of Dalecarlia.

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Dressed in the picturesque garb of a Dalesman—*i.e.* a short jacket and a round cap edged with silver—the King addressed the villagers of Mora from a churchyard overlooking Lake Seljan. "Friends!" he said, "the stranger defiles the sacred soil of our country. I am betrayed by our nobles! I come to you for help!"

At Falun, the chief town of Dalecarlia, Gustavus descended one of the mines, and drank to the health of the miners at the bottom. The delight of the people of Falun to see their King in a grimy miner's blouse knew no bounds. They took the horses out of the carriage and dragged him through the town, shouting, "Long live the King."

Within a few days Gustavus rallied round him a force of 6,000 loyal Dalecarlians, whom he led to Gothenburg. He hurried on in advance of his troops to the beleaguered town, riding two hundred and fifty miles in the space of forty-eight hours, and arriving at the city gates all by himself at midnight.

Gothenburg was then sorely pressed by the Danes. The Governor was on the point of surrendering when the King arrived, and everything was in a state of hopeless confusion.

Gustavus lost no time in taking prompt and

decided measures. He dismissed the Governor, and appointed in his place Count Sparre, a veteran warrior of seventy. A bridge, which formed the garrison's only means of retreat, was blown up; the fortifications were improved, and a message was sent to the enemy that "Gothenburg would resist till reduced to ashes."

The brave Dalesmen poured every day into the city, and in the short space of a week Gothenburg was furnished with a garrison of 7,000 men, all eager to fight. The siege, however, was not continued, owing to the intervention of England and Prussia. The Powers were alarmed at the growing ambition of Russia, and Mr. Hugh Elliot, the British Minister in Copenhagen, was instructed by his Government to prevent further aggressions on the part of Russia, and to keep the balance of the Northern Powers *in statu quo.*

With this end in view, he persuaded the Danes to retire from Gothenburg, threatening them with the bombardment of Copenhagen by the British fleet should they fail to do so. Hugh Elliot was justly proud of his diplomatic achievement.

"Six weeks after my arrival in Sweden," he writes, "a victorious army of 12,000 men,

animated by the presence of their prince, were checked in their progress by my single efforts, and induced to evacuate Swedish territories. . . . Perhaps in the annals of history there is not to be found a more striking testimony of deference paid by a foreign prince to a King of England than that the Prince Royal of Denmark manifested on this trying occasion."

The King of Sweden's energy in coping with a difficult position, his march through Dalecarlia and his firmness at Gothenburg produced a favourable impression in the country, and for a short time he enjoyed a fresh spell of his old popularity.

. . . . .

In October 1788, shortly after the siege of Gothenburg, Axel Fersen went to Paris, and from that time till the Revolution he practically made his home in France. His King had entrusted him with a mission of a somewhat delicate nature.

The Swedish ambassador in Paris, Baron de Staël, was strongly influenced by his wife's Liberal and advanced views. Gustavus distrusted him, and he chose young Fersen to be his secret representative at the French Court,

and to report to him all that was going on in those disturbed times. The King put no confidence in Staël's reports, coloured as they were by his enthusiasm for the Revolution.

Fersen arrived in France at a time when the country was in a very disturbed state. The Assembly of the Notables had proved a failure, and now there was a general cry for the States-general to be summoned. This great representative gathering had not met since 1614; the King was averse to its convocation, and only gave his consent with reluctance.

During the winter of 1788–9 France was seething over the Elections to the States-general. Fersen describes to his father in the following letter the general excitement that prevailed:

"*Dec.* 10, 1788.

"All men's minds are in a ferment; nothing is talked of but a Constitution; the women especially are joining in this hubbub—and you know as well as I do what influence they have in this country. It is a mania; everybody is an administrator and can only talk of progress; the lackeys in the ante-chambers occupy themselves in reading the pamphlets that come out—ten or twelve a day—and I

do not know how the printing presses can do the work.

"We are having a very severe winter here—nothing but frosts these last three weeks. There are four inches of snow in the streets, and all the roofs are covered. The river is frozen, which makes the provisioning of Paris most difficult; a famine is feared here, and also in the provinces. There is very little corn, and the mills cannot work owing to the scarcity of water, for it has not rained since August."

The misery of the people was accentuated by the severe winter of 1788–9. Half-starved and sinister-looking men prowled about Paris, ready for any mischief.

The Royal family did all they could to alleviate the distress, but their private charities could only be as a drop in the ocean. The Queen made her children forgo the usual toys they received on New Year's Eve, in order that more bread and blankets might be bought for the poor, and Madame Elisabeth ran into debt by her extensive charities that winter.

The spring of 1789 saw threatening clouds throughout the political horizon of Europe.

In Sweden the King had forced an Act of his own making upon an unwilling Diet, thus causing great irritation and discontent. The chiefs of the Anjala mutiny had been executed, and some of the leading nobles, including Count Frederick Fersen, had been thrown into prison.

A coming struggle at the meeting of the States-general was clearly foreseen, and the thought of it filled Marie Antoinette with profound depression. She was not now the giddy, thoughtless woman she had been. Trouble had developed the best part of her nature, her true self was now coming to the fore, and her frivolity had fallen off her like a cloak.

The thought of her unpopularity was a deep grief to her. It had been brought home to her by unmistakable signs. Monsieur, in his *Memoirs*, relates a melancholy story about the Queen.

He was walking with her one evening in the gardens of Trianon, when they overheard some men talking behind a hedge. A voice said: "They dance, they sing, they laugh, and they don't bother their heads for a moment about the misery of the people, who furnish them with the money for all their mad extravagances. Tell me, is it wrong of me to

feel a hatred for the great ones of the earth? And is not the Queen the guiltiest of them all?"

These and worse things were said, and Monsieur did his best to draw his sister-in-law away. But she remained fixed to the spot. "No! no!" she whispered, "let me drink of my cup to the dregs. I want to know, I must know, the sad opinions people have of me, opinions which have hitherto been too long hidden from me."

The Queen was in grievous anxiety that spring about the health of her little son. The child was suffering from a wasting disease that sapped his strength day by day. Dressed in a little sailor suit, with the Cross of St. Louis at his breast, he was very fair to look upon, but the little cheeks were painfully thin, and the blue eyes unnaturally large and bright. The Queen's eyes filled with tears when she looked at her son's frail little form.

The Dauphin was dying, but she could not bring herself to believe it.

. . . . .

The spring of 1789 was the happiest time of Fersen's life, for he was constantly with the Queen, and enjoyed her society in a quiet and

companionable way—not seeing her, as formerly, in a vortex of gaiety and dissipation. Indeed, the times were now far too bad for fêtes and balls to be thought of.

Fersen's respectful devotion was a real solace to the lonely and anxious Queen, and she began to appreciate at its true value the unselfishness of his chivalrous love. It is agreed upon by most historians that he was never her lover in the accepted sense of the term.

M. Geffroy writes: "This devotion must strike us as being chivalrous and sincere; we can trace it from the first youthful impression, which doubtless made way, when the hour of trouble came, for a feeling of tender adoration; but nowhere do we find, either in the various authorities that are still unpublished or in the printed documents, that this feeling ever ceased to be respectful."

Fersen, "hiding a fiery soul under a crust of ice," came when the skies were dark to lay his services and his life—if need be—at the Queen's feet, asking for nothing in return. He was a courtier in every sense of the word, but he was a courtier of sorrow.

That spring the Queen gave him her portrait and a daintily bound little pocket-book, which

he reverently treasured to the end of his life. On the flyleaf she wrote :

" Qu'écrirez-vous sur ces tablettes ?
Quels secrets leur confierez-vous ?
Ah ! sans doute elles furent faites
Pour les souvenirs les plus doux !
En attendant qu'à cet usage
Le souvenir soit employé—
Qu'il soit permis à l'amitié
D'en remplir la première page ! "

CHAPTER VI

1789

The Procession of the States-general—Its opening Session—The dissensions among the members—The *Tiers État* become the National Assembly—The oath of the Tennis Court—The fall of the Bastille—The formation of the National Guard—The King's visit to Paris—His concessions to the National Assembly—The burning of the castles—The nobles and clergy renounce their privileges—The emigration—The banquet at Versailles—The wave of Royalist enthusiasm—The Queen's afternoon at Trianon.

MAY 4, 1789, the opening day of the States-general, dawned brightly at Versailles, after a night's rain. The town was packed, and crowds had been out all night in the wet streets in order to get good places for the procession that was to go from Notre Dame to the Church of St. Louis at ten o'clock in the morning. The windows, roofs, and balconies along the route were thronged with people. A general feeling of excitement prevailed.

This was the advent of a new era that was to bring golden days to France. The abuses

of feudalism, the injustices of the Middle Ages were at last going to be swept away for ever. A new world was about to be born, and every one was full of eager and hopeful anticipation.

The procession was very imposing, and the *mise-en-scène* was worthy of the great occasion. A double row of soldiers lined the streets. First came the clergy of Versailles in caps and gowns. Then came the six hundred members of the *Tiers État* (the Third Estate), the Commoners of the realm, with short black cloaks, muslin cravats, and slouched hats.

All hopes were centred on these soberly attired men, and they received a warm ovation from the public. Then came the deputies from the *noblesse*, in gold-embroidered cloaks of velvet, cravats of the finest lace, white stockings and plumed hats. They and the stately dignitaries of the Church who followed were but coldly received. Then came the Household, the Body-guard in their uniforms of red and blue, the Swiss Guard, and the Archbishop of Paris under a canopy bearing the Host. The strings of the canopy were held by four Princes of the Blood. The King, in magnificent robes, followed in a gilded coach, drawn by horses covered with magnificent trappings and nodding plumes.

The Queen and her ladies brought up the rear of the procession. There were no greetings for Marie Antoinette that day. She sat upright in her coach, holding her beautiful head very high, as was her wont, but her face was pale and sad. When she heard the round of applause that greeted the appearance of the Duc d'Orléans, she turned very white, and almost fainted. How bitter it was to her that she, the Queen, should be received in icy silence by her people, while he, the acknowledged enemy of the King, should be welcomed with thunders of applause!

For one moment the Queen's set lips relaxed into a sad little smile, and this was as she looked up to the balcony where her sick boy had been laid to watch the procession.

There were unmistakable signs of hostile feeling on the part of the people towards the *noblesse* and the Royal family (the Duc d'Orléans excepted) on this memorable day.

Madame Campan, the Queen's lady-in-waiting, bears witness to this in her *Mémoires*. She writes: "I mingled with the crowd. I heard a hundred vociferations. A woman, whose face was covered with a black lace veil, seized me by the arm with some violence, and said, calling me by my name: 'I know you

very well; tell your Queen not to meddle with the Government any longer. Let her leave her husband and our good States-general to effect the happiness of the people.' 'Yes, yes!' cried a man; 'tell her over and over again that it will not be with these States as with the others, which produced no good to the people—that the nation is too enlightened in 1789 not to make something more of them, and that there will not be seen now a deputy of the *Tiers État* making a speech with one knee on the ground. Tell her all this—do you hear?'"

. . . . .

The next morning (May 5) the States-general assembled in the great *Salle des Menus* at Versailles. On a dais at the end of the hall was the throne, overhung by a canopy of purple velvet embroidered with the lilies of France. By the side of the throne was an arm-chair for the Queen, and low chairs for the Princes and Princesses. The Nobles, ablaze with diamonds, sat on velvet chairs along one side of the hall. The Clergy sat on velvet chairs facing them. The Commons who had been kept waiting out in the rain till permitted to come in by a special side door, sat on hard benches in the middle of the hall—a

solid wedge of black between the two lines of colour.

The herald's trumpet announced the arrival of the King. The Assembly rose as the King, accompanied by the Queen and the Royal family, entered the Hall and took their places on the platform.

The King's speech was clear and to the point. He expressed his pleasure at the thought of all the benefits that he hoped would result from this Assembly of elected representatives of the people. His speech ended, the Royal family swept out of the Hall.

The discussions that arose among the Three Estates need not be gone into here. Suffice it to say that the whole crux of the situation lay in this: *whether the three Orders should sit and vote separately, or together.*

The *Tiers État* had determined not to be now what they had formerly been—a useless minority overpowered by the other two Orders. They refused to do anything until joined by the *Noblesse* and the Clergy. All May was spent in wrangles and disputes.

On June 17 the *Tiers État* declared themselves to be no longer the *Tiers État,* but the *National Assembly,* and on that day the six

hundred took a solemn oath to fulfil faithfully all the duties laid upon them.

Fersen writes from Valenciennes to his father on June 26 :

" A number of the clergy have joined the *Tiers*, and even some members of the *noblesse*. They have constituted themselves the National Assembly. The King has held a royal *séance*, where he quashed the decrees of the *Tiers*; but the National Assembly has taken no notice of the King's prohibition and goes on with its sittings. The *noblesse* is on the King's side. The agitation is tremendous. You know the French, and you can imagine of what foolishnesses they are capable, but you never could have imagined the extravagance of all that is now said and written. . . . The King seems inclined to stick to what he has said, and they are bringing from twelve to fifteen thousand soldiers to the environs of Versailles. But the most serious part of it all is that no one can be sure nowadays of the French soldier."

On June 20, when the National Assembly came to the Hall to resume their debates, they found it closed " *by order of the King.*" It was a wet day, and it was some time before they could find a roof to shelter them. At

last they trooped with their dripping umbrellas into a tennis court, which happened to be vacant. There, on the damp cement floor, the six hundred and their new allies stood up, and with arms extended took a solemn oath "not to disperse until they had given the nation a Constitution."

In vain the King ordered his refractory Commons to follow the old usage and to vote separately each according to his Order. They refused to budge an inch from the position they had taken up.

In a few days the clergy joined them *en masse*. Then the King turned completely round and ordered the nobles to join the other two Orders. Sending for M. de Luxembourg, the President of the *Noblesse*, he said: 'I beg the Order of the *Noblesse* to join the other two Orders, and if it is not enough to beg them to do so, I order it."

Thus the *Tiers Etat* won the day.

The National Assembly set to work at once to shape a new Constitution for the country. The Court party, wedded to the old order of things, looked upon the new Government with suspicion and distrust. Troops were massed round Versailles and Paris in anticipation of coming trouble.

In July the King dismissed the hero of the hour, the popular Necker, and his place was filled by a favourite of the Queen's, the Baron de Breteuil. This produced an uproar in Paris, resulting in the famous attack on the Bastille on July 14, which is too well known to be detailed here.

Fersen, who was with his regiment at Valenciennes, thus describes the state of things in France during the tempestuous month of July :

" The mob took possession of the Bastille, and M. de Launay, the governor, was massacred in a horrible way. They took 36,000 guns from the Invalides, they hanged M. de Flesselle, provost of the Merchants; all carriages were stopped, and every one in Paris was obliged to go on foot. Every nobleman was insulted. . . . No one was allowed to leave Paris, all was confusion, consternation, and disorder. The authorities at the *Hôtel de Ville* have little power—as proved by the murder of MM. de Foulon and Berthier. . . . You will read in the *Journal de Paris* and in the other papers the details of what happened—which are pretty correct. Nothing is exaggerated, for it is impossible to exaggerate what happened, and what is still going on.

There are disturbances all over the country, but they seem to be only parodies of the riots in Paris."

The news of the capture of the Bastille spread terror and alarm among all at Court, except the stolid King. "It is a riot, I suppose," he said placidly to the Minister who brought him the news.

"Sire! it is a Revolution!" was the reply.

The National Assembly took energetic steps to cope with the dangerous state of anarchy in the capital. An emergency army was organized in which 48,000 men enrolled themselves. This became the famous *National Guard.*

The young Marquis de Lafayette, who had so distinguished himself in the American War, was appointed Commander-in-Chief. The National Guard adopted a cockade of red, white, and blue, forming the *Tricolour*, the famous badge of the Revolution, and still the emblem of Republican France.

Shortly after the riots of July 14 the King visited Paris. A tricolour badge was presented to him, which he pinned on his breast. "Everything went off well," he said to the Queen on his return. "The people of Paris are good, though rather susceptible. They

have been led astray—but they love us, and that's the chief thing."

Louis tried to pacify the National Assembly by agreeing to all their demands; and Necker was recalled, to the great satisfaction of the people.

Fersen writes from Valenciennes on July 22:

"At present things are quiet in Paris, but no one can tell how long they will remain so. Crowds are leaving the town every day; this winter it will be a desert place. The King paid a visit to the capital the other day; it was hoped that this would restore peace, but it does not seem to have had the desired effect. . . . It is the lowest dregs of the populace that are causing all these disorders. . . . We have had a little commotion here, but it is all over and done with.

"The rioters seem to be in all parts of the country; they systematically plunder the abbeys and the *châteaux*, and they are being hunted down everywhere. Yesterday in one place alone we took a hundred and nineteen of them; we shall probably take many more. Such is the sad state of this country, my dear father; it is passing through an acute crisis, and we must wait and see what the States-general will do. All bonds are broken, mili-

tary discipline has disappeared. They will not find it as easy to restore order as it was to overthrow it."

The attack on the Bastille produced a general conflagration throughout France. In many parts the peasants rose against their lords, and attacked the feudal castles. "Let us, too, destroy our Bastilles," they said; "let us destroy for ever these hateful dens of tyranny, and above all let us take care to burn the *archives*, for it is on their authority we are condemned to our servile condition."

So they burnt and pillaged the castles, and woe to the unhappy inmates who fell into their ferocious hands! It was no easy matter for the new Government to deal with the wide-spread disorder in the country. It was realised that the much-needed reforms must be no longer delayed, for however culpable the rioters were, there was at that time great excuse for the sorely tried and oppressed peasantry.

On the night of August 4 the nobles and clergy voluntarily renounced their feudal rights and privileges. All kinds of abuses were swept away at one fell stroke during that famous night. The personal servitude of the peasants was abolished, the game laws were done away with, and all peculiar privileges of any kind

whatsoever in France were entirely swept away.

Madame Elisabeth, in a letter to a friend, says of this famous night:

"On Tuesday night the Assembly sat till two o'clock. The nobles, with an enthusiasm worthy of the French name, renounced all their feudal rights. . . . The clergy also gave up their tithes and perquisites, and the power of holding several benefices. The decree has been sent forth into all the provinces. I hope it may stop the burning of the castles."

In spite, however, of the new decrees, excesses and disturbances still continued throughout the country.

Fersen writes to his father:

"*Sept.* 3, 1789.

"The people in the provinces are intoxicated with the ideas that the philosophers have been spreading in their writings—viz., that all men are equal. The abolition of feudal and other rights—passed by the Assembly after three hours' debate, and after supper—makes the people think that they need pay nothing now. Everywhere they are committing the most shocking excesses against the feudal castles, which they rob and burn, with all the archives. They ill-treat the inhabitants, if they find

them. . . . The nobles are in despair, the clergy are mad, and the *Tiers État* is uneasy.

"The *canaille* governs now. . . . No one dares to give orders, and no one obeys. This is the liberty of France, and the state to which we have come!"

The new order of things was so intolerable to many of the nobles that they determined to leave France and to seek a home in other countries. The tide of emigration, so fatal to the cause of the Monarchy, set in at this time, and in less than three weeks six thousand of the wealthiest landowners in France left the country.

The Comte d'Artois and his family, the Princes of Condé, Conti, and Bourbon, the Baron de Breteuil, the Polignacs, and many others, had fled the country as early as in July. Anarchy reigned throughout August and September.

Fersen writes: "Since July 13 there have been 12,750 deserters—not reckoning the *Gardes Françaises*. . . . All bonds are broken. The authority of the King is gone. Paris is trembling before forty or fifty thousand armed ruffians."

It was felt that Versailles was insufficiently

protected, and the "Flanders" regiment was summoned to go there in September.

It was, and is still, the custom in France for the officers of a resident garrison to entertain the officers of a newly-arrived regiment. Thus, on Thursday, October 1, the Body-Guard at Versailles arranged a banquet for their brother officers of the Flanders Regiment.

The repast took place in the Theatre of the *Château.* The tables were set in the form of a horseshoe on the stage, and covers were laid for a hundred and ten guests.

The feast was sumptuous, costing over £2 a head; wine flowed freely, and the healths of their Majesties were enthusiastically toasted. Just when the sweets were being served, the King and Queen made their appearance in one of the boxes of the theatre. There was great excitement and applause at their unexpected visit.

Mme Campan * thus describes the scene:

"The air '*Richard, ô mon roi!*' was played, and shouts of '*Vive le Roi!*' shook the roof for several minutes. I had with me one of my nieces and a young person brought up with Madame by her Majesty. They were crying '*Vive le Roi!*' with all their might,

* Lady-in-waiting to Marie Antoinette.

when a deputy of the *Tiers État*—who was in the next box to mine, and whom I had never seen—called to them, and reproached them for their exclamations; it hurt him, he said, to see young and handsome Frenchwomen brought up in such servile habits, screaming so outrageously for the life of one man, and with true fanaticism exalting him in their hearts above even their dearest relations; he told them what contempt worthy American women would feel on seeing Frenchwomen thus corrupted from their earliest infancy.

"My niece replied with tolerable spirit, and I requested the deputy to put an end to the subject, which could by no means afford him any satisfaction, inasmuch as the young persons who were with me lived, as well as myself, for the sole purpose of serving and loving the King.

"The guests clamoured for the King and Queen to come down from their box. The Queen, looking more beautiful than ever in her deep mourning,* came down holding the new little Dauphin in her arms, and followed by the King attired in hunting dress. The band struck up again '*O Richard! ô mon roi!*' and a delirium of loyalty swept over the assembled guests.

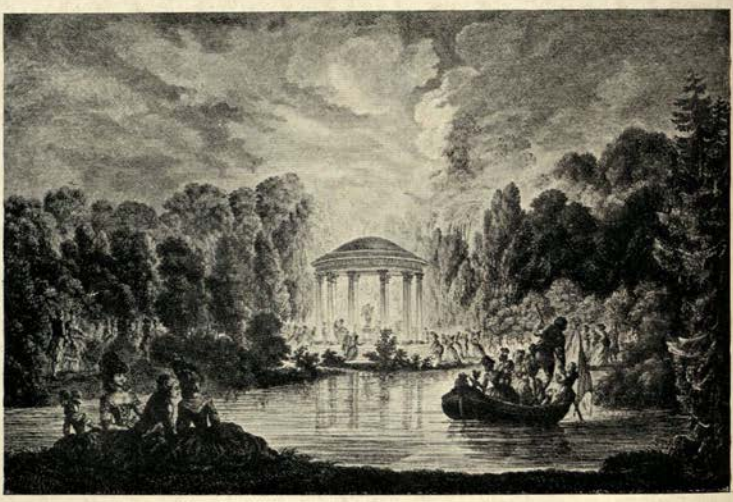
* The Dauphin had died on June 4.

"There were shouts and cheers for the Royal family, the tricolour cockades were exchanged for white ones, which the ladies of the Court threw down from their boxes, and white flowers were cast at the Queen's feet.

"The exaltation grew as the evening wore on, and, heated with wine and excitement, the guests became quarrelsome and abusive. They sallied forth into the streets, insulted the uniform of the National Guard, and made such an uproar that the people of Versailles became alarmed. Morning broke before the wild crowd of frantic Royalists left the Cour de Marbre, where they had stood half the night raising cheer after cheer for the Royal family."

. . . . .

In the early afternoon of October 5, soon after dinner, the Queen set out to spend a few hours at Trianon. She was accompanied, as usual, by a footman, who walked at a respectful distance behind her. The King was out hunting at Meudon. It was a cloudy and threatening October afternoon, and the leaves were just beginning to turn. After inspecting the flower-beds, the Queen gave her head gardener instructions for the coming winter,



TRIANON.

then she wandered about the grounds lost in thought.

Presently a fine drizzle came on, and she sought shelter in the moss-covered grotto—one of her favourite nooks.

The black clouds, the damp chilly wind and the falling leaves, were in tune with her melancholy reflections. Her thoughts dwelt on the little son she had so recently lost, and all his cruel sufferings, on the dangers that beset the throne, and the weakness of her husband. And she sighed as she thought of her own unpopularity. Why did the people hate her so fiercely? What had she done to deserve it? The political horizon loomed as threateningly before her as the black scudding clouds above. What had the future in store for them all?

As the Queen sat sadly dreaming in her shelter she saw a figure hurrying towards her. It was a page, and he brought her a note from the Minister, M. de St. Priest.

Hastily opening it, she read that an invasion of a Paris mob was hourly expected at Versailles, and the Minister begged that she would return as quickly as possible to the Palace.

The message came as a culminating point

to her sad reflections. Here was danger, not looming vaguely in the distance, but menacing her and hers at the present moment. She must leave the peace of her beloved Trianon, and she must go forth to meet it bravely. Gathering up her skirts, she started off at a brisk pace.

The autumn wind sighed and moaned among the trees as she went her way; the swaying flowers and the rustling leaves whispered an everlasting adieu to their Queen. Trianon would never see her again!

CHAPTER VII

1789–1790

The arrival of the mob at Versailles—The discussions in the Council Chamber—The King's indecision—The arrival of Lafayette and the National Guard—The attack on the Palace—The Queen's escape—She faces the mob—The King consents to go to Paris—The drive to the capital—Arrival at the Tuileries—The Queen speaks to the *poissardes*—Life at the Tuileries.

THE King was hunting at Meudon. He was in the act of jotting down the "bag" in his game-book when a courier from the Palace rode up at full speed. Breathlessly he told the King and the gentlemen who were with him that they must return at once to Versailles without a moment's delay. Paris was marching on Versailles—hordes of terrible-looking people were arriving every hour, no one knew what was going to happen.

The King and his party mounted immediately, and setting spurs to their horses, rode at full speed up hill and down dale to Versailles. The rain, which had threatened all day, began to fall heavily.

Splashed with rain and mud, Louis hurried up the great staircase upon his arrival at the Palace, and entered the Council Room. There anxious faces awaited him. The situation was extremely serious. The three great avenues leading to the Palace were filling up every hour with a mob composed of the *canaille* of Paris. A large number of them were women. All were soaked with rain and exhausted with hunger; many of them were in rags and tatters. More were pouring in every hour. It was a dangerous mob, armed with pikes and bill-hooks, ready for any mischief. The women seemed to take the lead, and were more ferocious in their behaviour than the men. Hunger had turned many of them into absolute savages. They shrieked out curses against the Queen—for the whole affair was more or less a demonstration against Marie Antoinette. The people had never forgiven her the follies and frivolities of her younger days. She was a wiser woman now, but her reputation for extravagance still clung to her, and she was looked upon as the cause of the empty exchequer, and therefore of the people's misery. "Antoinette!" screamed the *poissardes*, "we will make ribbons of your skin, we will fill our inkpots with your blood!"

Flourishing in the air the knives and pikes they had brought with them, they yelled: "Here are weapons enough to finish off the Austrian!"

The feasting of October 6 accounted for the influx of this dangerous mob. That disastrous banquet had given rise to the wildest rumours in Paris. "A foreign invasion—encouraged by the Queen—was being prepared. The King had thrown off his mask! He was going to betray his country to the foreigner! The National Assembly was about to be dissolved! The Court feasted at Versailles while Paris starved! The King must live no more at Versailles! He must come to Paris and see for himself how the people suffered!"

So, maddened by misery and hunger, Paris decided to go and fetch the King.

. . . . .

In the Council Chamber, St. Priest * was urging the King to send away his wife and children to Rambouillet and to attack the rioters with a large force of cavalry.

But the Queen refused point blank to leave the King. "Danger is at hand," she said; "my place is by the King's side." It was

* One of the Ministers.

represented to her how great her personal danger was—for the mob was maddened against her, and she might become its victim. But she only said: "My mother taught me not to fear death. I will wait patiently for it."

The King strode up and down the Council Room with long strides, in great agitation and perplexity.

Madame Elisabeth urged him not to go to Paris. "It is not to Paris, sire, that you should go," she said; "you have still devoted battalions and faithful guards to protect you. I implore you, brother, not to go to Paris."

St. Priest then urged that the King should fly with the Queen to Rambouillet. "If you are taken to Paris, sire, your crown will be lost," he said. "What! a King in flight! a King in flight!" repeated the dazed and distracted monarch. The Queen was strongly opposed to going to Paris. She said to Monsieur: "If I were only free I should kill myself here rather than go and suffer a hundred deaths at Paris. Do you hear the howling of the mob? Do you see those wretches thirsting for blood? And those are 'our good people'! You will agree the way in which they express their love is somewhat strange!"

Necker was all for the King and Queen going

to Paris, in order to satisfy the urgent demands of the people.

Early in the evening a letter was brought from Lafayette announcing his speedy arrival with the National Guard. There was great relief in the Palace when he arrived with a large force at eleven o'clock in the evening. Just then Lafayette was the idol of the people, and no one was better fitted than he to cope with the tumult. Though the Court party distrusted him, they were thankful enough for his help on this occasion.

Lafayette assured the King that with his force of 20,000 men he would undertake to restore order. So sanguine was he that he stayed that night in the town with his kinsman the Comte de Noailles. The Palace was protected by the Body-guard.

Axel Fersen kept guard too, that night, in the *Château*. Danger threatened the Queen, and he must be close at hand to protect her if need be.

. . . . .

It was two o'clock before the Royal family retired to bed. All was then perfectly quiet. For the sake of precaution four ladies-in-waiting sat up that night in an ante-chamber close to the Queen's bedroom, to keep guard.

At about half-past five in the morning they heard a confused noise of shots and shouts not far off. One of the ladies flew into the Queen's room to awaken her. Another rushed in the direction of the tumult. A terrible sight awaited her as she entered the Salle des Gardes. One of the Body-guard, his face covered with blood, was bravely defending the entrance to the Queen's apartments from an armed rabble. "Madame! save the Queen! her life is in danger!" he shouted to the lady-in-waiting, who, hastily shutting the door, and leaving him to his fate, rushed back to her mistress.

Meanwhile the ladies had hastily slipped a petticoat and a yellow silk *robe de chambre* over the Queen, and she had fled with dishevelled hair to the King's rooms. To her horror she found the door locked. "Open! for the love of God!" she cried; and happily her voice was recognised by Turgy, the King's valet, who admitted her.

The King was not in his room, for, hearing the tumult, he had rushed to the Queen's rooms to seek her. He was thankful to find his wife in safety when he returned.

Presently the Royal children were brought in—very frightened at all the unusual noise

and the dreadful cries in the Palace. Madame Elisabeth and Monsieur and Madame soon followed, and the early morning light showed the pale faces and the dishevelled toilettes of the little group gathered in the King's room.

Meanwhile a party of ruffians had burst into the Queen's rooms, and were prodding the bed and furniture with their sticks and pikes, in the hope of finding their victim. The mob, like a sea, surged outside in the Cour de Marbre.

Madame Royale, in her *Mémoires*, writes: "The courtyard of the Tuileries presented a horrible sight. A crowd of women, almost naked, and men armed with pikes threatened our windows with dreadful cries."

Two of the Body-guard had already been slain, and their heads were danced up and down on poles outside the Palace windows.

Fersen himself, who was doing duty as a guard, had a narrow escape from the hands of the rabble, and only saved himself by jumping out of a window.

Lafayette arrived just in time to prevent a general massacre of the Body-guard. He and his soldiers soon cleared off the mob from the Palace, and he pacified the people with

assurances that the King would certainly agree to go to Paris.

Louis consented to show himself to the people on the balcony. A thousand voices greeted his appearance, and there was a roar of: "The King to Paris! The King to Paris!"

Then a cry arose for the Queen. What was to be done? Could she show herself to the people who had threatened her with death?

Lafayette went up to her. "Madame," he said, "the people call for you to come out on the balcony."

For a moment Marie Antoinette shrank from the ordeal.

"It is necessary to restore peace, Madame."

"Then I will go anywhere, even to death."

She stepped out on to the balcony holding her children by the hand. Cries of "No children" immediately arose, and she signed to them to go back into the King's room. Then the daughter of Maria Theresa faced that ugly, yelling mob alone. One or two pistols were levelled at her, and she expected death at any moment.

Involuntarily she raised her eyes to heaven. As she wrote to the Princesse de Lamballe afterwards: "I still seem to hear the howling

roar of the crowd and the cries of my guards. These horrible scenes will occur again, but death has been too near for me to fear it. I thought I should be torn to pieces."

Her courage and beauty won the day.

When Lafayette knelt and kissed her hand cries of "*Vive le général! Vive la reine!*" arose. The mob, which had been so abusive, now became enthusiastic, especially when the announcement was made that the King would go to Paris. "We will take the King to Paris! We will take the King to Paris!" arose on all sides.

The decision was abhorrent to the Queen. "Promise me at least this," she said to the King—"that when next such an occasion may come you will fly while there is yet time." Her face was flushed and tear-stained. She had lived for a lifetime in those few hours. "We are lost!" she exclaimed to Madame Campan, "and we are being dragged away perhaps to death."

A few hasty preparations were made for the removal to Paris, but every one was so flustered and frightened that a hundred things were forgotten.

Between one and two o'clock the Royal family set out for the capital. The King and

Queen, Madame Elisabeth, Monsieur, the children and their governess * occupied one great coach. The inhabitants of Versailles assembled in the avenues and swarmed on the roofs to see the departure of the Royal family. Many of them joined with the mob in shouting "*Vive la Nation!*" Mirabeau came out of the Assembly to watch the procession.

Thirty thousand people accompanied the Royal family in that fateful drive. The National Guard came first. Then came a mixed crowd—men with pikes, workmen and women, some of the latter riding on the cannon or on the soldiers' horses. They were followed by carts laden with corn, round which the people danced and shouted: "We bring the baker, the baker's wife, and the baker's boy." The Swiss Guard, the Body-guard, and the Dragoons rode in the vicinity of the coach. But all was confusion, and the soldiers and the people mingled pell-mell, with little order or ceremony.

Lady Holland in her Memoirs declares that during the drive Fersen disguised himself as an *ouvrier*, and shouting out "*Vive la Nation!*" kept close to the royal carriage, so as to protect the Queen from any violence.

* Mme de Tourzel.

Fersen does not mention this fact in his letters, but it seems to have been the current report in Brussels in 1793.

Madame Royale thus describes the horrible drive: "In front of the cortège were carried the heads of the two *Gardes du Corps* who had been killed. Close to the carriage was M. de Lafayette on horseback, surrounded by troops of the Flanders Regiment on foot . . . and Grenadiers of the French Guard. Along the whole way the brigands never ceased firing with their muskets, and it was useless for M. de Lafayette to oppose them. They shouted: "*Vive la Nation! À bas les Calotins! à bas les prêtres!*" . . . Having entered Paris, the shouts, the clamour, the insults increased with the mob . . . it took us two hours to reach the Hôtel de Ville."

It was dark by the time they arrived at the barrier of the city, where Bailly, the newly elected Mayor, duly presented the keys to the King.

The streets of Paris were lined with soldiers of the National Guard, and with masses of people. So dense were the crowds that the Royal family had to alight at the Place de Grève and walk to the Hôtel de Ville, where an address of welcome was presented to the King.

He replied in a few suitable words, saying that he came with pleasure and confidence to his good town of Paris.

It was ten o'clock before the Royal family arrived at the Tuileries. They were utterly exhausted with the terrible strain they had gone through. The Queen shivered and turned very white as she entered the Palace. "Sister, do you feel ill?" anxiously inquired Madame Elisabeth. "I am cold," said the Queen; "I feel as if I were entering a tomb."

The Tuileries had not been regularly occupied for nearly a century. Things were by no means ready for the Royal family's reception; a few hasty preparations had been made, but the rooms were only partially furnished, and dust lay thick everywhere.

"How ugly everything is here, *maman*!" exclaimed the little Dauphin.

"Louis XIV used to lodge here sometimes," said his mother, "and we need not be more particular than he was."

The next day the courtyards and terraces of the Palace swarmed with people, all anxious to catch a glimpse of the Royal family. This strange mob was swayed by motives of curiosity, hatred, and affection.

The Queen had to show herself repeatedly at the window to the crowds of excited *poissardes* on the terrace.

That evening she wrote to the Comte de Mercy:

"Be easy in your mind: I am quite well. By forgetting where we are and how we came here, I suppose we ought to be pleased with the good feeling we find among the people, especially this morning. I hope, if there is a sufficiency of bread, that things will right themselves soon.

"I speak all day to the people—to the *poissardes*, to the National Guard; they all hold out their hands to me, I hold out mine to them. This morning they begged me to stay in Paris. I told them, on behalf of the King, who was by me, that it entirely rested with them whether we should stay, and that we desired nothing better; but I said that all violence must cease, and that the smallest drop of blood shed by them would make us fly with horror. Those near me said that all violence was over and done with. I told the *poissardes* to go and repeat to the others all that we had said."

The Queen, with her happy knack of always saying the right and graceful thing at the

right moment, produced a most favourable impression on the *poissardes.*

One of them boldly told her " that she must now put away from her all such courtiers as ruin kings, and that she must learn to love the good citizens of Paris." To this she replied " that she had always loved them at Versailles, and would likewise do so in Paris." " Oh yes ! " shouted another *poissarde,* " that is all very fine, but you know that on July 4th you wanted to besiege the city and have it bombarded, and that on October 6th you wanted to fly to the frontier ! " To this the Queen sadly replied that the cause of all the present unhappiness was that they, the people, believed statements such as these, that were absolutely without any foundation of truth. One of the women addressed the Queen in German, and there was a burst of applause when Marie Antoinette smilingly told her that she had become so entirely French as even to have forgotten her mother tongue."

Madame Elisabeth, in writing to a friend about those first few days at the Tuileries, and the Queen's conversations with the *poissardes,* says :

" She spoke to them with all the grace that

you know so well; everything went off most successfully this morning; all to-day we have had to show ourselves at the windows, and the courts and gardens have been full of people the whole day."

On October 9th Fersen wrote to his father:

"All the newspapers will have told you, my dear father, what took place at Versailles on Monday the 5th and Tuesday the 6th, and of the King's arrival in Paris with all the Royal family. I witnessed everything, and I returned to Paris in one of the King's carriages; * we were six and a half hours on the road. May God preserve me from ever beholding such a sad spectacle as that of those two days!

"The people † seemed enchanted to see the King and his family. The Queen was warmly applauded, as she cannot fail to be when she is known and justice is done to her desire for good and her kindness of heart. The States-general are going to arrive in Paris and commence their sittings there, but I don't know what day."

The first week after the King's arrival heavy wagons loaded with furniture and

* This does not carry out Lady Holland's story.

† The Parisians.

bedding constantly arrived from Versailles. Soon the Royal family had settled down in their new quarters, and taken up the threads of their old life.

The outward life of the Court went on as usual: the Queen had her card-parties on Sundays and Tuesdays; the weekly receptions of the *Corps Diplomatique* took place on Sundays; the Royal family dined in public; and yet everything was on a new and different footing. The faithful Body-guard were replaced by the National Guard, six hundred of whom were stationed at the Palace. It was a real trial to the King and Queen to part with their devoted *Gardes du Corps*, and the little Dauphin, young as he was, fretted for his old friends. "I see quite well," he said, "that there are wicked people who trouble papa, and I regret very much our good Body-guard. I loved them much better than these Guards, whom I don't care for in the very least!"

Spies were everywhere, agitation was seething amongst all classes, in the towns and in the country; revolutionary pamphlets were sold in thousands every day, political clubs were springing up in all directions—in short, the great Revolution, which had been smouldering for so long in the depths, was now rapidly

coming to the surface, soon to blaze forth into a gigantic flame that would spread all over the country.

The coarsest libels and lampoons about the King and Queen were circulated broadcast over the city, and the Royal family found it the wisest plan to live as secluded a life as possible. The Queen occupied herself in the morning with her children and her correspondence; in the afternoon, after dinner, she played billiards with the King, to give him a little exercise, for he sorely missed his active outdoor life of Versailles. In the evening the Queen and Madame Elisabeth worked at their tapestry.

Many years afterwards, when Josephine took up her abode with Napoleon at the Tuileries, she found there a carpet which had been worked by Marie Antoinette during those three long years of captivity. Josephine immediately took steps to restore it to the Duchesse d'Angoulême.

. . . . .

The Princesse de Lamballe had been absent from Court during this momentous time. On receiving a letter from the Queen, with details of all the horrible events of October 6,

she nearly fainted away. "Oh! *mon papa!*" she exclaimed to her father-in-law, "what horrible things have happened! I shall go back to them at once!" And she hastened to Paris to share trouble and danger with her beloved mistress.

Not long after the Queen's arrival at the Tuileries a deputation from the Paris Commune waited upon her to ask for certain particulars about the events of October 5 and 6, with a view to punishing the chief offenders. But the Queen refused to give them any information on the subject. "No!" she said, "I will never be the accuser of the King's subjects. I have seen all—I have known all—and I have forgotten all."

CHAPTER VIII

1790—1791

Fersen's secret mission in Paris—The state of France in 1790—The work of the National Assembly—Madame's first Communion—The Royal family at St. Cloud—Mirabeau is won over to the Court—His interview with the Queen at St. Cloud—The Fête of the Federation—Political parties in Paris—The aims and objects of the *Émigrés*—Plans for the King's flight—The proposals of Bouillé—The vacillation of the King—The death of Mirabeau—The intercepted journey to St. Cloud.

On January 6, 1790, Axel Fersen received an important letter from the King of Sweden, authorising him to remain henceforward in Paris, and to be the secret intermediary of a correspondence between him and Louis XVI. When Fersen received these orders he was at Aix-la-Chapelle, where he had gone to see his friend Baron Taube, also a secret emissary of the King of Sweden. He was not at that time in good health. He never was a robust man, and his illness in America seems to have left him far from strong.

He was delighted with the mission entrusted

to him. Here was a wonderful opportunity for serving the Queen, and proving his boundless devotion to her. The skies were dark now, and the time had come when his love could satisfy itself in *service*.

Towards the end of January he left his regiment at Valenciennes and settled in his house in the rue de Matignon. He received his usual welcome at Court. To quote Mr. Hilaire Belloc: "Whether he came or went, his quiet image, the one fixed thing she had known in a world she could not know, remained. . . . He had been with the Queen continually, reserved, and of that breeding which she longed for—the impassionate poise of the North. . . . The girl who had met him, a boy, in 1774, was now a woman of thirty and more; chance glimpses alone had lit up the very long space of those years; she had suffered all the business of the necklace, all the rising hatred of Paris, without any too close a word from him; and she was entering the Revolution and the way to death when he reappeared. Henceforward he did not leave her. That bond, which time had neither increased nor diminished, and which permanent absence and silence had left unfalsified, now became a living communion between them."

The position of the Royal family at the beginning of 1790 was a sorrowful one. The Queen, in writing to her dear friend the Duchesse de Polignac, thus describes it: "We are watched like criminals, and it is indeed hard to be patient under such restraint. To be continually anxious about those nearest to you, and not to be able to appear at a window without being overwhelmed with insults, or to take the poor innocent children into the fresh air without exposing them to shouts and cries: what a position! dear heart!"

Fersen writes to his father in February 1790: "What a frightful state this beautiful country is in! . . . It is in the most complete anarchy. All bonds are broken; there is no obedience to laws, no respect for religion, of which only the name exists. The people have been taught to feel their power, and they use it ferociously. The nobles, clergy, and parliaments, who gave the first examples of disobedience and resistance, have become the first victims; they are destroyed, and their castles are being burnt. . . . The National Assembly continues to do ridiculous things. The provinces are in a more disturbed state than ever. The King remains a prisoner in Paris. His position—and that of the Queen, who feels much more

acutely than he does—is terrible. She has shown, and still shows, such courage that she has gained many friends."

Meanwhile the National Assembly had been hard at work reorganising the whole Constitution of the country. It is extraordinary what radical changes had been effected in the space of a few months. The old *régime* had been torn up from its very roots.

Mme de Staël, in a letter to the King of Sweden, thus graphically describes the complete overthrow of the old systems:

"I ask myself if a thousand years have elapsed since this time twelve months ago—since this time four weeks ago—since this time fourteen days ago. . . . It is certain that France has made a prodigious leap. The man whose life had been suspended during this short interval would certainly believe, in returning to the world, that he had been absent a very long time. He would ask, 'Where is the Bastille? What! no more *lettres-de-cachet*? Every one free to speak or write? What! The King no more at Versailles! He has no longer any Court or pomp? He has no longer even any power? Who then has taken it from him? The National Assembly? What is that? A transformation of the

States-General? The three orders united? What do you say? No more orders? All equal citizens? But the clergy! You don't mean to say its power has all disappeared, its wealth has been all swallowed up? . . . And the nobility in its turn reduced to nothing? Despoiled of its privileges? Despoiled of its feudal rights? And by its own renunciation? Are you not cramming me with nonsense? What did the Parliament say, then? Surely this is another of your fine tales! No more Parliaments? But the Army? Are you going to tell me that, too, has passed out of existence? What, then, are all the soldiers I see pass? A National Guard? What now is that? . . . Must I admit that these soldiers are citizens, and that the nation guards itself? What extraordinary changes! And you say all this has occurred in seven months only!' "

In April Madame Royale, who was then twelve years old, received her first Communion at the Church of St. Germain d'Auxerrois. The Queen, very quietly dressed, was present at the ceremony, and was deeply touched by her little daughter's earnest devotion. The King did not give her the diamonds usually presented to a daughter of France on these occasions. "You are much too sensible, my

dear child," he said to her, "to attach any importance to jewels just when you are thinking of how to make your heart a fit ornament and sanctuary for your Lord. Besides, the misery in the country is extreme, and poverty abounds; and I feel sure that you would rather forgo your jewels when the poor are starving."

In May the Court removed to the Palace of St. Cloud for the summer. The peaceful quiet there was a refreshing change after the turmoil and dangers of Paris.

Madame Elisabeth writes to a friend: "I no longer hear those villainous criers who, of late, not content with standing at the gates of the Tuileries, have roamed the gardens, so that no one could help hearing their infamies."

The King was able to take the exercise so dear to him, and though he did not hunt he took long rides in the woods. The Queen enjoyed walking with her children in the beautiful gardens and shady parks of St. Cloud. The Paris life of the last few months haunted her like a nightmare. Yet in former days she had longed to live in the gay capital. "Who could have told me," she remarked to Mme de Tourzel,* "that my desire would only be

* The governess of the Royal children.

accomplished by my being overwhelmed with bitterness there, seeing the King and his family the captives of a revolted people!" Marie Antoinette, with her quick perception, saw clearly how things were drifting.

Inch by inch the powers of the King were being taken away from him. Day by day the throne itself was being undermined. What were all the recent upheavals leading to? Monarchy was being weighed in the balance of new ideas and conceptions. Would it be found wanting? If so, what would happen?

The time had come for the Queen to take a definite lead, for the King, with his weakness and indecision, was utterly incapable of coping with the difficult and intricate situation of 1790.

The Emperor Joseph II had written to his sister advising her to try to win over the leaders of the Assembly. The leading power of the Assembly at that time was Mirabeau, the great aristocratic democrat. He, "with the thick black locks, the shaggy beetle brows, the rough-hewn, seamed, carbuncled face" (as Carlyle describes him), was the one man who understood the needs of the moment. If the Queen could only get him as her ally, all might be well.

At first she revolted at the idea. "We shall not sink so low, I trust, as to be obliged to seek help from Mirabeau," she said. She associated him in her mind with the horrors of October 5 and 6, but when she was assured that he had had no hand in them, she consented to have dealings with him. Mirabeau was just then in great financial straits (this was a normal state of things with him!). The King paid his debts, and the Queen agreed to have a private interview with him on July 3. Mirabeau alighted at a little gate in the park of St. Cloud, which led into a small private garden, walled in by shrubs. There the Queen received him.

She opened the conversation by saying: "With a common enemy, with a man who had sworn to destroy monarchy without appreciating its utility among a great people, I should at this moment be guilty of a most ill-advised step, but in speaking to a *Mirabeau* . . ."

The great man's vanity was flattered, and he was delighted with the Queen's graciousness. He told her in plain words the exact condition of the country, and freely offered his help and advice.

The evident sincerity of the man pleased

her, in spite of all the prejudices she had formed against him.

Marie Antoinette always recognised greatness. As Carlyle says: "It is among the honourable tokens of this high, ill-fated heart that no mind of any endowment, no Mirabeau, no Barnave, no Dumouriez ever came face to face with her, but in spite of all prepossession she was forced to recognise it."

The memorable interview lasted for three-quarters of an hour. The Queen thus describes it to her brother:

"I have consented to a secret interview. I saw 'the monster' a few days ago, at first with an emotion which made me feel ill. But his language immediately disarmed me. . . . The King was by me, and was delighted with Mirabeau, who seemed to him full of loyalty and good faith. It is thought that all will come right now. The first condition of Mirabeau's plan is that we should leave Paris, not to go *abroad,* but to some place in *France.*"

When Mirabeau took his leave the Queen offered him her hand to kiss. "Madame, the Monarchy is saved," he said, as he bowed over it. Mirabeau carried away a good impression of the much maligned Queen, and

declared to his friends "that she was the only man the King had about him."

Meanwhile all Paris was preparing to celebrate the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille. A great fête was to take place on the Champ de Mars on July 14, when the new Constitution would be solemnly ratified by deputies from all parts of the country.

A huge amphitheatre, capable of seating forty thousand people, had been dug out of the turf on the Champ de Mars. Plenty of willing volunteers had helped the workmen in this gigantic undertaking. It was looked upon as a sacred work, and the people gloried in taking a share in it. Even great ladies helped in loading the barrows.

The Royal family were to be present at the ceremony, when the King was to take the oath of faithfulness to the Nation. The Queen dreaded the day. She wrote to the Comte de Mercy: "I cannot think of the approaching event without a shudder. For us it will mean all that is painful and trying, but we must be present." Paris grew wild with excitement as the time approached.

The long-looked-for day arrived amidst torrents of rain. Many had spent all the night in the Champ de Mars in order to get

good places. The ground was very muddy. A huge erection, called "*The Altar of the Country,*" rose from the centre of the field. Its four sides were covered with inscriptions, among the most conspicuous of which were: "*The Nation, The Law, The King.*"

The salute of many guns heralded the arrival of the National Assembly. The King and the Royal family followed surrounded by a brilliant *entourage.*

The King seated himself by the side of the President of the Assembly. The Queen and her ladies took their places on a raised stand some distance behind. Three hundred priests in white surplices, and wearing tricolour scarves, were ranged on the altar steps. Mass was celebrated by the Bishop of Autun at four o'clock in the afternoon.

"At the elevation of the Host M. de Lafayette gave the signal for the oath, ascended the altar steps, and pronounced it. In a moment every sword was drawn and every head raised. Lafayette then went to the King and told him that the moment had arrived for him to take the oath; thirty thousand voices repeated it." *

The King took the oath in these words:

* *Mémoires of Mme de Tourzel.*

"I, King of the French, swear to use the authority which the constitutional laws of the State have given me, to maintain the fundamental laws as prescribed by the National Assembly and accepted by me."

The President repeated the oath, after which thirty thousand voices re-echoed the solemn words.

Then followed a delirium of enthusiasm. The Queen, catching the excitement of the hour, lifted the little Dauphin in her arms, and showed him to the people. "Here is my son!" she cried: "he joins as well as myself in these sentiments!" The people burst forth into cheers and demonstrations of loyalty to the Royal family.

Fersen's impressions of the great day are interesting:

"This famous Federation, which was looked upon with so much fear, has passed off very quietly," he writes. "The ceremony, which might have been grand, fine, and imposing, because of the great numbers who took part in it, and the beauty of the scene, was simply ridiculous, owing to the disorder and confusion that reigned. You will read accounts of it in the newspapers, and you can picture the Champ de Mars. But the papers will not say

that there was no order, that no one was in his right place; that the soldiers whose duty it was to guard the arena obeyed no one, but ran about singing and dancing; that before the arrival of the King and the federal troops they took a priest and two monks up to the altar, put on them grenadiers' caps, made them each shoulder a gun, and marched them right round the amphitheatre singing and dancing, just as savages do before devouring a Christian. While Mass was said, dancing and singing went on; no one knelt at the Elevation of the Host, so that many people did not even know that Mass had been said. . . . The provincial deputies were all for the King and Queen, and showed them many signs of respect and faithfulness. Their Majesties treated them very well. They were all enchanted with the Queen, who showed them the greatest kindness and graciousness."

The following "slang" song describing the Fête was composed at the time, and became vastly popular. It was sung to the well-known air of: "*Ah! le bel oiseau!*"

Ah! quel superbe serment!
Comme ça t'on n'en verra guère.
Ah! quel superbe serment—
S'il n'y eût ni pluie ni vent!

Figurez-vous le Champ de Mars,
Qu'est bien plus grand qu' not' cimetière.
Il était tout plein de soldats
Qu'avaient quasi l'air de guerre.
Oh ! le superbe serment ! etc.

Fallait voir nos députés,
Dont quelques-uns faisaient la moue,
C'étaient de vrais culs crottés
Qui se trainaient dans la boue—
Oh ! le superbe serment ! etc.

Il y a't'un chose cependant
Qui m'afflige et m'oppresse
Ça fait du tort au serment
C'est le boiteux * qu'a dit la messe.
Oh ! le superbe serment !

Comme ça t'on n'en verra guère
De ce superbe serment
Qu'était si beau—
Qu'était si grand !

The wave of loyalty and enthusiasm at the Fête of the Federation was but a momentary gleam in those darkening days. The Revolution was advancing with steady and rapid strides, and the political horizon was becoming every day more threatening.

Necker, who had shown himself incapable of setting the finances in order, had been dismissed. Lafayette was by no means proving himself to be a leader of men.

* The Bishop of Autun, who was lame, had an evil reputation.

The Assembly was divided into three factions:

1. *The Constitutionalists* * or the *Moderate* Party, led by Mirabeau and Lafayette.

2. The *Extremists*, or *Jacobins* (so called from their headquarters being the Jacobin Club), who openly desired a Republic.

3. The *Court Party*, who hoped to restore the old system.

The Jacobins were fast becoming the dominant party in the country. Mutiny and disaffection were spreading throughout the army. In the Church there was chaos. A number of priests refused to comply with the new regulations decreed by the Assembly, and Rome backed them up with all her might. The Vatican was sorely vexed with the King for having accepted the new ecclesiastical constitution.†

The emigration continued, and the King was thus deprived of many strong supporters who should have rallied round him in his hour of need. The policy of the *émigrés* formed another difficulty in his path. They refused to accept or recognise the new state of things

* Commonly called the Girondists.

† All the ecclesiastical property had been taken over by the State, and the clergy were now paid by the Government.

existing in their country, and they heartily despised the King for all his concessions. Their object was to bring back the old *régime* by means of the *sword*, and to do this they were strongly in favour of foreign help. Posing as Crusaders against the Revolution, they hoped to bring back the old Constitution by means of *invasion*. The King, who was a student of history, foresaw the extreme danger of such a policy. He realised that Charles I of England had been brought to the scaffold for having made war on his people, and the idea of a foreign invasion was abhorrent to him.

His wisest policy would have been to lead the Moderates against the Extremists, and to have put away all thoughts of flight or of foreign help. But as dangers and humiliations pressed more and more thickly round the Royal family the idea of flight shaped itself more and more definitely in their minds.

Fersen writes to his father at the end of 1790:

"Disorders are increasing, and, worst of all, one cannot see an end to it all. Paris, which used to be quiet and safe enough, is full of thieves; one hears of constant robberies,

and as there is little order, they are not prevented or punished. . . . This state of things cannot last. . . . Once the discontent is at its height, the new order of things will be destroyed as quickly as the old—this is the result of the vivacity and lightness of French heads."

The Queen wrote to her brother in December:

"I can't appear at a window, even with my children, without being insulted by a drunken mob to whom I have never done the least harm. . . . My duty is to stay where Providence has placed me, and to offer my body, if need be, to the assassins who would murder the King. I should be unworthy of our mother's race if danger made me fly from the King and my children."

Mirabeau's advice to the King and Queen was to withdraw openly to a loyal town near Paris. Others suggested that they should go to the frontier and there treat with the Assembly. The Marquis de Bouillé, General of the King's forces in the South, was among those who urged the latter plan.

He proposed that the Emperor of Austria should mass troops on the frontier and adopt a menacing attitude towards France. This

would serve as a pretext for the King's immediate presence on the frontier. He strongly urged immediate steps to be taken, for, although he was one of the few generals who still retained the confidence of his troops, disaffection was rapidly spreading in the army, and he could not answer for his soldiers later on.

The King hesitated and vacillated before the various courses open before him. A friendly reception from the people or the Assembly would make him reject one day all thoughts of flight. The next day a fresh insult or hostile demonstration would make him reject all thoughts of staying in his capital and temporising with the Assembly. The perplexities and worries of his situation made him ill, and he fell into a state of utter apathy and melancholy. Fersen writes of him in the spring of 1791: "He feels his position keenly, but he has not the gift of expressing himself or of saying pleasant things." Of the Queen he writes: "Her courage never fails, and it is impossible to admire her sufficiently."

On April 2, 1791, Mirabeau died, and the King was thus deprived of a valuable counsellor. Had Mirabeau lived, he would probably have steered his King and country safely

through the rocks and shoals of the Revolution. "I take with me the ruins of the Monarchy," he said on his death-bed.

The King fully realised the loss he sustained in Mirabeau's death. "Do not rejoice, Madame," he said to his wife in speaking of it. "We are sustaining a heavier loss than you think."

As time went on the Queen became more and more convinced of the necessity of flight. Brussels seemed a desirable place to go to, for her sister, the Archduchess Marie Christine, was the *Gouvernante* of the Netherlands, and would give her a warm welcome. Early in March the Queen packed her jewels, and entrusted them to the care of M. Léonard, her *coiffeur*. She ordered a trunk filled with new clothes to be sent to Mme Campan's sister in Arras, with instructions to forward it to her on her arrival at Brussels.

It was arranged that the Court should go for a few weeks to St. Cloud on April 18. The King and Queen looked forward to spending a quiet Holy Week and Easter there. But for some time past rumours had got about that the King intended to desert his people. The report was now spread that the Royal visit to St. Cloud was only a pretext—that the

King and Queen were really going to the frontier to join the *émigrés*, and to seek foreign help against their country. The report gathered and grew, and it was determined to prevent the King from going to St. Cloud.

Fersen was not at the Tuileries when the riot of the 18th took place. "I don't know how I could have borne all the insults that they suffered had I been there," he writes to the King of Sweden. But he received a detailed account of what took place from eye-witnesses, and he sent the following report to Baron Taube:

"At 11.30 * the King was at Mass. M. Bailly had come before to say that his departure might cause a disturbance, and that the people seemed to wish to oppose it. The King said that he had given liberty to every one to go where they liked, and that it would be very extraordinary if he was the only man who could not enjoy going two leagues away to enjoy the fresh air, and that he had decided to go. He came down with the Queen, Mme Elisabeth, the children, and Mme de Tourzel; and as the carriages had not been able to enter the Cour des Princes,

* April 18.

he wanted to go and fetch them in the Carrousel. As they told him there was a huge crowd there, he stopped in the middle of the Cour des Princes, and the Queen proposed to get into the carriage which had entered the Court, although it was only a *berline*. All six got into it, and when the horses were at the gate the National Guards refused to open it and let the King go. In vain M. de Lafayette spoke to them, and told them that only enemies of the Constitution could act as they were doing—that in hindering the King's free-will they gave him the aspect of a prisoner, thus annulling all the decrees he had sanctioned. They only answered him with invectives, and with reiterations that they would not let the King go. They used the most injurious terms against the King : that he was a cursed aristocrat, a fat pig—that he was incapable of governing ; that he had better be deposed and replaced by the Duc d'Orléans ; that he was only a public functionary ; that he was paid 25,000,000, but that it was far too much, and that he must do what they wanted . . . that he was surrounded by aristocrats, by refractory priests ; that they must be chased away. . . . The Grenadiers, when they arrived, swore that the King should not go away ; several of them

showed their ball cartridge, saying they would fire on the King if he made the least movement to start. All the household who approached the carriage were insulted. . . . They insulted the Swiss Guard. . . . They insulted the ecclesiastics at the castle windows. . . . M. de Lafayette asked the King if he wished force to be used to respect the law and let him go. . . . The King refused to employ force, and said: 'I do not wish any blood shed for me. . . .'

"At last, after two and a quarter hours' waiting, and useless efforts on the part of M. de Lafayette, the King ordered the carriage to go back. In dismounting from the carriage the soldiers pressed round the Royal family, and some of them said, 'We will defend you.' The Queen replied, looking at them haughtily, 'Yes, we count upon you, but you must admit that now we are not free.' As the people pressed and thronged into the vestibule, the Queen took the Dauphin in her arms. Mme Elisabeth looked after Madame, and they hurried off as quickly as possible."

The next day the Queen wrote to Mercy: "The King and I are agreed that the time has come to put an end to this state of things,

and to take the step we have spoken to you of. So look out for a sudden journey. All is being prepared, and I will tell you day by day, as far as I can, all the events that are taking place."

CHAPTER IX

1791

The Duc d'Orléans meets the *berline* on its trial trip—Preparations for the flight—Colonel Crawford and Mrs. Sullivan—The *berline*—The twentieth of June—The safe arrival of the fugitives at Bondy—Fersen takes leave of the "Baroness Korff."

ONE June day in 1791 the Duc d'Orléans was driving along the road to Vincennes with his friend Mme de Buffon, when he saw to his surprise a huge yellow coach and six horses, racing along the road at full speed. As it came nearer, what was their surprise to see that the driver of this extraordinary vehicle was none other than the popular young Swede —the Comte de Fersen!

"Hallo! my dear Count!" shouted the Duke. "Are you mad? You'll break your neck at that game! Why have you got such a big carriage? Is it to carry away a whole Opera Chorus?"

"No, Monseigneur! I leave you the Chorus!" Fersen shouted gaily back.

For the rest of the drive Orléans puzzled his brains to know what game the young Count could now be up to.

Fersen, during the rest of his drive, inwardly cursed the fate that had brought him face to face with the Duke on that particular afternoon. It was the trial trip of the famous *berline* that was to take the King and Queen away from danger in the capital to safety on the frontier.

But we must go back to the events of April. The insults of the 18th had made the King's course at last perfectly clear. He was obviously a prisoner, and he must escape from the bonds that were daily tightening round him. Flight was the only thing possible, but it must be skilfully planned, and the utmost secrecy must be observed. Fersen, the ever ready and willing knight of the King and Queen, was entrusted with the arrangements of the scheme.

The responsibility was a heavy one, and the work entailed endless anxiety, but Fersen welcomed the burden, and he put his whole soul into the project. In conjunction with the Marquis of Bouillé, he made a careful study of the proposed route * and of the disposition of troops that were to cover the King's flight.

* To Montmédy.

All details, such as the construction of the coach, the disguises of the Royal family, etc., were worked out by him, and the financial arrangements were also left in his hands. All these matters entailed a vast amount of correspondence, which had to be carried on with the utmost caution and secrecy.

That he was indispensable to the King at this time may be seen from a letter he wrote to Taube in May, telling him that he would do his best to present himself to the King of Sweden * at the earliest opportunity, but adding: "Should it happen that the King cannot leave Paris, it will be impossible for me to come, for he cannot effect his escape without me; I alone am in his confidence, and there seems to be no one else on whose discretion he can entirely rely."

The following extracts from the correspondence between Fersen and Bouillé may give some idea of the negotiations and plans for the flight:

Marquis de Bouillé to the Comte de Fersen

"*May* 9, 1791.

"Send M. Goguelat to me. He must be with you. . . . Above all, see that you have

* Then at Aix-la-Chapelle.

plenty of money. . . . Be sure and see that the safety of the route to Châlons is secured."

Fersen to the Marquis de Bouillé

"*May* 26.

"I have written to Goguelat telling him to go to you, and to do all that you command. He is a safe man, he only wants calming down. The King approves of the route, and all will be arranged according to your plans. . . . I am sending by to-morrow's or Tuesday's diligence, addressed to M. de Coutades, 1,000 in *assignats* wrapped up in white silk."

Fersen to the Marquis de Bouillé

"*June* 13.

"The departure is fixed for the 20th, at midnight. It has had to be postponed till Monday evening, because of an evilly disposed *femme de chambre* of the Dauphin, who can't be got rid of till Monday morning. . . . The King will wear a red coat. . . . To avoid all suspicion at Châlons the detachment had better not arrive at the bridge of Sommevêsle before Tuesday at noon—the King might arrive there by 2.30. The departure remains irrevocably fixed for the 20th, at midnight. . . . Rely on me."

By the first week in June all the arrangements for the flight had been made. A few faithful friends had been initiated into the secret. Among these were Colonel Crawford, an Englishman living in Paris who was devoted to the King's cause, and his friend, Mrs. Sullivan, a plucky Irishwoman loyal to the core, who took a leading part in the plot. Assuming the name of a Russian lady, Baroness Korff, she had ordered the *berline* to be built as early as March. Under this name she had obtained passports for herself and five other people, who, she gave out, would accompany her on her journey.

These she gave to the Royal family, while she obtained fresh ones for herself and party, on the plea that the others had been accidentally burnt.

Mme de Tourzel, the governess, was to pass as the Baroness Korff on the journey, the King as her valet, the Queen as her governess, Madame Elisabeth as the companion, and the children as her little girls, Amalie and Aglaia.

The coach was built to accommodate nine persons, six inside and three on the box. It was painted outside in two shades of yellow, inside it was upholstered in white velvet. It

was furnished with every luxury for travelling—portable pockets, a cooking apparatus, lamps with reflectors, a leather canteen for wine, green silk blinds, etc.

In the beginning of June it was conveyed to Fersen's stables, and after its trial trip it was removed to Colonel Crawford's house in the rue de Clichy.

On June 15 the King sent the following letter to the General de Bouillé :

" My intention being to proceed to Montmédy on the approaching 20th of June, the Sieur Bouillé, Lieutenant-General of my armies, is ordered to place troops according as he shall think proper for the safety of my person, and that of my family, along the route from Châlons-s.-Marne to Montmédy."

During the first fortnight of June Fersen was constantly in and out of the Tuileries, taking to the Royal family things necessary for their journey, and carrying out each day as much of their baggage as he could conceal.

His *Journal*, laconic though it is, best describes his preparations.

" *Thursday, June* 16.—Went to the Queen at 9.30. Carried away some baggage myself. They suspect nothing neither here nor in the town.

"*Friday, June* 17.—To Bondy and Bourget (to reconnoitre the route). Dined at home.

"*Saturday, June* 18.—Was with the Queen from 2.30 to 6 o'clock. Nice letter from Emperor.

"*Sunday,* 19.—Saw the King. Brought away 600 *livres* and the seals. Stayed at Palace from 11 o'clock till midnight."

At last the fateful 20th dawned.

The day's work began early for Fersen. At 7.30 he went to the coach-builders' to make arrangements about a carriage for the Queen's waiting-women. He returned home in the said carriage, and had breakfast. At noon he drove to the Swedish Embassy, and had ten minutes' talk with Staël, returning home to dinner.

We quote from Madame Royale's *Mémoires* what took place at the Tuileries that day.

"On June 20, 1791, my father and mother seemed to me greatly agitated during the whole day, and much occupied, without my knowing the reason. After dinner they sent us—my brother and me—into another room, and shut themselves in their own, alone with my aunt. I knew later that this was the moment when they told the latter of their plan for escaping."

Madame Elisabeth received the news calmly. Her brother,* who saw her shortly afterwards, describes her as being "tranquil, resigned to the will of Heaven, satisfied, but without any violent joy, as if she had been in possession of the secret a year before."

Late in the afternoon Fersen drove to the National Assembly, and from there to the Tuileries, where he had a final interview with the King and Queen. He found Marie Antoinette in a very agitated state: "We agreed," he writes, "that there was no time for hesitation, and that the journey was bound to take place. We agreed upon the hour, etc., and that if they were stopped my best course would be to go to Brussels and work in their interest. As he left me, the King said: 'M. de Fersen, whatever may happen to me, I shall never forget all that you have done for me.' The Queen wept much. At six o'clock I left her. She took her children out for a walk."

Fersen drove home, and then went to the rue de Clichy to inspect the *berline* finally and superintend the packing of the silver, provisions, etc. He had thought of every little detail that could add to the comfort of the travellers.

* Monsieur.

He had packed among the provisions a large piece of "*bœuf à la mode,*" of which he knew the King and Queen were fond.

Having seen that all was in order, he returned home and dashed off a note to the Queen about an alteration in the meeting-place for the waiting-women. This he delivered himself at the Palace at eight o'clock, and was thankful to find all was quiet there. He brought back in his carriage Valory and Moustier, two faithful gentlemen of the Body-guard who were to go with them.

At ten o'clock he dispatched them with five horses and his coachman—Balthazar Sapel—to Colonel Crawford's house.

His instructions were that they should drive the *berline* to the new barrier at the Faubourg St. Martin, and there await his arrival.

Balthazar Sapel, who was not "in the know," was struck with the magnificence of the *berline* at the rue de Clichy. "Who in the world are your travellers, mates?" he asked. "They seem to be pretty rich." "Comrade, you will soon learn," was the reply of the Guards.

To return to the Palace. When the Queen came back from her walk with the children she had a secret interview with the three

Guards who were to go with them. She came down late for supper, and found the King, Madame Elisabeth, Monsieur, and Madame awaiting her.

Monsieur writes in his *Mémoires*: "At last she came. I ran to embrace her. 'Take care!' she cried, 'not to upset me! It must not be seen that I have wept.' We supped, and remained all five together till near 11 o'clock. At the moment when I was about to take leave, the King, who till then had not informed me of the place of his destination, took me aside, and after telling me that he was going to Montmédy, positively directed me to proceed by the Austrian Low Countries to Longwy. Again we embraced each other tenderly, and at last separated, thoroughly persuaded—at least I was—that before four days we should all meet again in a place of safety."

The Queen was not with the others all the evening. At about ten o'clock she silently slipped out of the *salon* and crept to her daughter's room, where she knocked softly at the door.

The stealthy knocks frightened the little girl. Mme Brunier * opened the door to the

* One of Madame Royale's maids.

Queen, who told her to dress the Princess at once, as they were going on a journey that evening. Then the Queen glided into the adjoining room, where the Dauphin lay asleep. Drawing aside the bed-curtains, she bent over the sleeping child and whispered to him gently: "Darling! wake up! We are off! We are going to the wars, and there will be ever so many soldiers!" The boy rubbed his eyes, and sleepily asked if he might command his regiment. When his mother said "yes" he sprang out of bed and asked for his sword: "Quick, let us be off!" he cried, delighted. But he became somewhat cast down to find himself being dressed in girl's clothes. "We must be going to act a comedy since we are dressed up," he remarked to his sister.

Meanwhile Fersen had donned a coachman's livery, and mounting the box of a hackney coach had driven to the Cour des Princes, outside the Tuileries. It was about a quarter-past ten when he took up his position among the line of other cabs. So good was his disguise that his fellow cabbies did not doubt but that he was one of them. His heart was aching with suspense, but he played his part gallantly, cracking jokes and taking snuff with his

" mates " and chatting to them in their dialect.

. . . . .

At about 10.30 the Queen took her children by the hand, and led them into an empty room overlooking a courtyard. After waiting some time a tall man, muffled in a big overcoat, with a hat clapped over his eyes, entered, and silently taking the little Dauphin by the hand led him out into the courtyard. The child was not frightened, for he recognised in the tall silent man the friend who was always so kind to him—M. de Fersen. The Queen followed, with her daughter and Mme de Tourzel. It was a bright moonlight night, and the little party carefully crept in the shadow of the carriages that were drawn up along the wall. All except the Queen got safely into the hackney coach; she stole back to the palace.

The " coachman " mounted the box, cracked his whip and drove them off. Madame Royale writes: " To throw people off the scent we made several turns in Paris, and returned to the Petit Carrousel, near the Tuileries, to wait for my father and mother. My brother was lying at the bottom of the carriage under Mme de Tourzel's gown. We saw M. de

Lafayette pass close by us, going to the King's *coucher*. We waited there a full hour in the greatest impatience and uneasiness at my parents' long delay."

. . . . .

Their Majesties retired to bed as usual a little after eleven that night. The King went through all the usual ceremony of the *coucher*. Lafayette was present, and the King made valiant efforts to keep up a conversation with him, though it was manifest he was nervous, and preoccupied. It was observed that he went constantly to the window to see what the weather was like. The ceremony over, and all his visitors dismissed, he slipped into his private bedroom and got into bed. His valet drew the bed-curtains and went into an adjoining room to undress previous to going to bed in the King's room.

This was Louis' opportunity. Springing softly out of bed, he carefully drew the bed-curtains and slipped into the Dauphin's empty room. From there he reached the Queen's *entresol*, where he found his disguise for the journey—a large round hat, a grey wig, a brown coat, and a bottle-green overcoat with mother-of-pearl buttons.

The valet meanwhile re-entered the bed-

room and went to sleep, never dreaming that his master was not safe and asleep in bed.

. . . . .

Fersen was waiting with his hackney coach in the Petit Carrousel. It was the most anxious hour of his life. He whistled and chatted with the other cabbies, but his soul was sick with suspense. From time to time he got down from his box and walked round the cab as if to examine the horses, but in reality to keep a look-out for the fugitives.

"After waiting for one hour," writes Madame Royale, "I saw a woman approach and walk round our carriage. It made me fear we were discovered, but I was soon reassured by seeing the coachman open the carriage door to admit my aunt. . . . On entering the carriage she trod upon my brother, who was hidden at the bottom of it; he had the courage not to utter a cry. She assured us that all was quiet at Court, and that my father and mother would soon come. In fact, the King came almost immediately."

The King seemed very uneasy at not finding the Queen in the carriage. As time went on and she did not appear, he began to fear an accident had happened. It was all the others could do to prevent him from going back to

the palace to look for her. At last Marie Antoinette arrived, all breathless from her adventures. She had met Lafayette on his way from the *coucher*, and she had had to shrink into a corner to avoid being seen by him. Also she had missed her way somehow, and it had taken some time to retrace her steps. The King took her in his arms and kissed her tenderly. "How glad I am to see you here!" he repeated.

They all kissed each other, overjoyed at finding themselves together again.

First, they drove to Crawford's house, to satisfy themselves that the *berline* had started. Then the coach set off at a brisk pace in the direction of the Porte St. Martin.

Madame Royale writes: "Nothing happened till we reached the barrier, where we were to find the post carriage which was there to take us on. M. de Fersen did not know exactly where it would be; we were obliged to wait a rather long time, and my father got out, which made us uneasy. At last M. de Fersen came with the other carriage, into which we got."

Having safely installed the Royal family in the *berline*, Fersen seized the horses of the first carriage by their bits and forced them

into the ditch. Of course the cab overturned. Fersen smiled quietly as he said, "When the good people here get up to-morrow morning they will see there has been an accident." It was now between one and two o'clock.

Fersen mounted the box by the side of Balthazar Sapel, who took the reins. Speed was now the one thing needful. Every moment was precious; every inch of ground covered was a gain.

Balthazar Sapel did not make his horses go fast enough to please Fersen. "Go on! go on! drive quickly," he kept on urging, as he cracked the long whip he held. "Balthazar! your horses are no good! Speed them on! They will have plenty of time to rest soon."

Fersen knew that in *speed* now lay the only chance of success, and he was burning with a fever of impatience to get the coach on—on! At last the lumbering *berline* and the steaming horses arrived at Bondy, the first stopping-place on the route. Day had just dawned. The early morning light was cold and grey. Fersen and his coachman alighted from the box. The six relay horses stood in readiness in the courtyard of the inn.

The next stage of the drama was about to begin. Fersen had played his part and was

now to make his exit. He approached the door of the coach. His eyes shone with a strange light; his voice was very quiet, but it shook a little. The good King, grasping his hand, thanked him for all that he had done, and expressed his hope of soon being able to give him a practical proof of his gratitude. "We shall soon meet again, I hope, Monsieur le Comte," he added. The Queen's heart was too full for words. She gave her friend a long understanding look of deep gratitude, and he read the message. The coachman cracked his whip, and they were off.

"Adieu, Baroness Korff," said Fersen, as he raised his hat.

CHAPTER X

1791

Fersen's ride to Brussels—He hears the news of the King's capture—His arrival at Brussels—Pays a flying visit to Aix to see Gustavus III—Letters from the Queen—Fersen's diplomatic mission to Vienna—His interview with the Emperor Leopold—Madame de Polignac—News from Paris—The energy of the Queen—The Declaration of Pilnitz—The King accepts the Constitution—Fersen's correspondence with the Queen—The Legislative Assembly—The Queen desires a Congress—The attitude of Austria and England—The zeal of the King of Sweden—The sad position of the Royal Family.

A THOUSAND hopes and fears surged in Fersen's mind as he watched the retreating *berline*. Would all the plans, all the contrivings of the past anxious months be fraught with success? The fate of the Monarchy itself was bound up in that yellow coach rolling away into the far distance. It represented to his eyes the destiny of France. So far the great venture had been remarkably successful, but it was yet an early stage of the programme, and

much might happen between Bondy and Montmédy.

It seemed to Fersen, as he stood watching the *berline*, as if a great weight had fallen suddenly off his shoulders, the weight of all the anxiety of those past days. He sighed with relief at the thought that now all his responsibility had ceased. Yet it had been a joy to him to bear the burden, and he now felt a sudden blank in his life, for she, for whom he had toiled and planned, was gone. He consoled himself, however, with the thought of a speedy reunion with the Royal family, and, setting spurs to his horse, he rode off in the direction of Bourget, *en route* for the frontier. After more than twenty-four hours' hard riding he reached Mons at 6 a.m. Monsieur had arrived there the previous day, and Fersen had a hurried interview with him in the *Couronne Impériale*. "I gave way to my joy and cordially embraced M. de Fersen," Monsieur writes in his *Mémoires*. The news of the King's flight had leaked out at Mons, and there was great delight and excitement among the *émigrés*. Fersen only remained five hours at the inn of *La Femme Sauvage* at Mons, and from there he hastily wrote the following two letters.

To Field-Marshal the Comte de Fersen

"MONS, *June* 22, 6 a.m.

"I have this instant arrived, my dear father. The King and his whole family left Paris successfully on the 20th at midnight. I drove them as far as the first posting house. God grant that the rest of their journey may be equally fortunate! . . . I shall continue my journey at once along the frontier, so as to meet the King at Montmédy if he is fortunate enough to get there.

"AXEL FERSEN."

To Baron de Taube

"MONS, *June* 22, 11 a.m.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"The King, the Queen, Madame, and Madame Elisabeth left Paris at midnight. I accompanied them as far as Bondy without any mishap. I am off this moment to join them.

"AXEL FERSEN."

Soon after 11 o'clock the Count was on his way again. He notes in his *Journal*: "Started at 11 a.m. Plains till Namur. Then mountains. Every one pleased that the King is saved."

He arrived at Arlon the night of the 23rd, at 11 o'clock. There, to his amazement, he found the Marquis de Bouillé. The first glance at the General's face told him there was bad news! All had failed! The Royal family had been stopped at Varennes and taken back to Paris! The news was heart-breaking, and that night was a night of anguish for Axel Fersen! His *Journal* records it in a few matter-of-fact lines: "Arrived at Arlon 11 p.m. Found Bouillé. Learnt that King has been taken. Not many details known; the troops did not do their duty; the King was wanting in firmness and presence of mind. Rested there."

Sick at heart and weary in body, he sat down at midnight and penned the two following letters, in which one can read his profound depression:

To the King of Sweden

"*June* 23, *Midnight.*

"SIRE,

"Everything has failed. Sixteen leagues from the frontier the King was arrested and taken back to Paris. I am going to see M. de Mercy, and am the bearer of a letter from the King asking the Emperor to take

steps on his behalf. I will come and see your Majesty from Brussels.*

"I am with the most profound respect,

"Your Majesty's very humble and very obedient servant,

"AXEL FERSEN."

To Field-Marshal the Comte de Fersen

"ARLON, *June* 23, 1791, *Midnight.*

"All is lost, my dear father, and I am in despair. The King was arrested at Varennes, sixteen leagues from the frontier. Imagine my misery, and pity me! It was M. de Bouillé, who is here, who told me this news . . . I have only time to assure you of my respect and love.

"AXEL FERSEN.

The next morning he was off at 4.30.

His *Journal* says: "Fine day. Every one sorry the King is taken. Terribly sad. All in the Luxembourg sorry the King is taken. What a difference! Arrived at Namur at midnight. Found Monsieur there."

He had a few minutes' talk with Monsieur; a sad little interview it must have been—very

* Gustavus III was then at Spa.

different from the cheerful one a few hours before at Mons—and then he hurried on at 1 o'clock to Brussels, where he arrived at 2 o'clock the following afternoon. Not stopping to rest or dine, he went straight to the residence of the Comte de Mercy. To quote his *Journal*:

"A great many French in the *Hôtel de Bellevue*—the Comte de Mercy's house; did not find him at home; left the King's letter for him. Lots of people came to question me. Had a talk with Mercy in the evening. . . . He takes a gloomy view of things.

"*June* 26.—Fine and hot. Went to see Archduchess * at one o'clock. Very nice to me, and seemed much touched. Paid my court to the Comte d'Artois, who said nothing; spoke to Monsieur, who was very reserved and embarrassed. All this gives me a bad impression of state of affairs. . . . People are all mad. A thousand false rumours. Many spoke to me about the flight. They knew it was I who planned it.

"*June* 28.—News from Paris about King's return. Barnave and Pétion in the carriage. Too horrible! No applause. The Arch-

* The Archduchess Marie Christine, sister of Marie Antoinette, and *Gouvernante* of the Netherlands.

duchess proposed to send me to Vienna; accepted."

On June 29 the Count paid a flying visit to Aix-la-Chapelle to see the King of Sweden. He found Gustavus burning with rage against the French democrats, and all eagerness to form a coalition against them. He had just publicly broken off relations with the French Government, and he was ready and willing to take the sword and put himself at the head of a Counter-Revolution. He looked upon the Revolution in France as an imminent danger to the peace of Europe, and expressed himself strongly on the subject to Staël: "I look upon all those who come from this Assembly," he said, "as so many conspirators hired to kindle the flame of civil war in different States and to sow discord everywhere between the people and their sovereigns. Convinced as I am of this, I consider everything permissible to prevent them from succeeding." Various schemes fermented in his active mind, and he exerted himself feverishly to win over the other sovereigns of Europe to his way of thinking. An armed invasion on the part of Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, and Sardinia, was his scheme. These forces were to land at different points and work their way

towards the capital. Gustavus worked indefatigably at Aix on behalf of the Royalist cause. He sent couriers in all directions bearing long dispatches to the various Courts dealing with the situation in France. He delighted in gathering the French *émigrés* round him, and in entertaining them royally at his table three times a week. Aix became the centre of the Counter-Revolutionists, and Gustavus was the leading spirit among them.

Fersen refers to his visit to Aix in his *Journal*:

"*June* 30.—Arrived at Aix-la-Chapelle at half-past three. Saw the King. He wanted me to go to England. I proposed that Crawford should go, and I to Vienna. Agreed. All the French showed me much feeling. Deeply touched."

It was decided that Colonel Crawford should go to England with a letter to the obdurate Minister Pitt from the King of Sweden, and that Fersen should go to Vienna to exercise his diplomatic arts on the shifting and crafty Leopold.

Gustavus, in a parting interview with Crawford, clearly put before him his own views on the situation in France. "He told him that

COUNT AXEL DE FERSEN.

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his championship of the King of France was founded on principles of justice and good policy, and did not arise merely from a spirit of chivalry, as some of the late French orators were pleased to ascribe to him, for it was sufficiently evident that neither the state of his country nor his finances now admitted of his making campaigns by way of amusement or for the sake of being spoken of."

From Aix Gustavus wrote to Louis XVI offering him his condolences on the Varennes disaster, and assuring him of his continued help and support. Fersen enclosed the following note to the Queen :

"Aix, *June* 30.

"The King (of Sweden) is all for you. Here is a line from him. I go to-morrow to Brussels, and from there to Vienna to negotiate with the Powers and unite them. . . . I am well, and live only to serve you."

On July 1 the Count returned to Brussels, and a few days afterwards he had the joy of receiving a line from the Queen herself, dated June 28. It ran :

"Be at ease about us. We are alive. The leaders of the Assembly seem inclined to behave kindly. Speak to my relations about

taking steps from the outside; if they are afraid, terms must be made with them."

The next day a longer letter arrived:

"I exist. . . . I have been anxious about you, and how I grieve for all you are suffering from having no news of us! May Heaven permit this to reach you! Do not write to me. It would endanger you; and above all, do not come back to us here on any pretext. It is known that it was you who got us out of this place. All would be lost if you appeared. We are closely watched night and day. I do not mind that. . . . Be tranquil: nothing will happen to me. The Assembly wishes to treat us gently. . . . Adieu! . . . . I shall no longer be able to write to you."

On July 21 Fersen set out on his mission to the Court at Vienna with the object of enlisting the sympathy of the new Emperor Leopold * on behalf of the King and Queen of France.

On his way he passed through Coblenz, the headquarters of the *émigrés*, where Monsieur and the Comte d'Artois held a regular Court, and plotted and schemed for their own aggrandisement. Fersen had an audience with the Comte d'Artois, "who," he says, "spoke

* The Emperor Joseph II had died in 1790.

incessantly and never listened, was cock-sure of everything, and would only hear of force and no negotiations."

The Count arrived at Vienna, very tired, on August 2.

He notes in his *Journal*: "Hunted for rooms. Heaps of strangers—chiefly discontented Poles. . . . Went to the Prater at 6 o'clock to see Blanchard ascend in a balloon; very good. Beautiful place. Lots of people; superb walk by the Danube, and numbers of tea-gardens."

The Emperor granted him an audience on August 4. He remarks in his diary that "the Emperor speaks much and listens very little." Leopold was full of promises and professions of affection for his sister and her family, but in truth he was too wary a diplomatist to rush headlong into a war that might bring disaster and disunion to his country.

Fersen called on Kaunitz, the celebrated Austrian statesman, who plied him with questions about the flight to Varennes; but the Count was very brief and reserved in his replies, "as there were so many people there."

Invitations poured in upon Fersen during his stay at Vienna. He was too sad at heart to enjoy society, but he felt that his mission

obliged him to mix with as many people as possible in order to win over their sympathies to the cause.

At first he felt fairly hopeful about the Emperor's intentions, but it gradually dawned upon him that his promises were not to be relied upon, and that his policy was that of procrastination. The dilatoriness of the Austrian Ministers exasperated the Count. "Time is going on," he said to one of them, "and if the King of France is to be saved, you must make haste, for his position gets worse every day."

Madame de Polignac arrived in Vienna during Fersen's stay, and he called upon her at her hotel. He writes: "Went to see Mme de Polignac. She wept on seeing me—I felt both pleasure and pain in seeing her."

He does not seem to have been favourably impressed by her, for he writes later on: "Mme de Polignac has not the least shadow of gratitude towards the Queen. She certainly wept when she saw me, but her emotion was of short duration, and she talked far more of her own affairs than of her unhappy friend. She said a thousand things, and among them many not flattering to the Royal family."

Meanwhile the Royal family in Paris were

THE DUCHESSE DE POLIGNAC.

to all intents and purposes prisoners in the Tuileries. They were strictly guarded day and night, and had to endure the most humiliating restrictions.

Fersen writes: "They are never let out of sight. All their doors are kept open—guards are in the room adjoining the bedroom. The doors are only closed when the K.'s shirt is put on. When the Queen is in bed, they come to see if she is there—also during the night. Never by themselves. They can only talk in whispers. No one can enter the *Château* except by procuring a ticket from Lafayette or the Mayor."

The Queen's hair had turned quite grey with all the sorrow she had gone through. She sent a wisp of it in a ring to the Princesse de Lamballe, who was at Brussels, with the inscription: "*Whitened by sorrow.*" The Princess had just returned from a secret mission to England, where she had been sent by the Queen to enlist the support of Pitt on behalf of the King of France. She had met with little encouragement from the cautious English statesman, who did not intend to let any sentimental considerations for the French Royal family lead him into war.

Mme de Lamballe was most anxious to return to her beloved mistress, but the Queen wrote again and again urging her not to do so. "No—once again—do not return, my dear heart," she wrote. "Do not throw yourself into the tiger's jaws. I suffer already too much uneasiness for my husband and my poor little children."

The terrible experiences Marie Antoinette had gone through after Varennes had profoundly depressed her. The daily insults of the people, the indignities of her captivity, the absence of her dearest friends, the utter inertia and helplessness of her husband, were enough to dishearten the bravest woman.

The frivolities of the past had vanished for ever from the Queen's life. "Don't send me back my diamonds," she writes to the Archduchess Marie Christine in September: "what should I do with them here? I don't dress myself *en grande toilette* any more. My life is a new kind of existence. I suffer night and day. I am changing perceptibly; my good days are over. They will kill me, my dear Christine. After my death, defend me with all your might. They accuse me of horrors. I need not tell you I am innocent."

Marie Antoinette would not allow herself to be weighed down by her sorrows. Her exertions at this time were incredible. She left no stone unturned to enlist the help of the foreign powers, and her daily correspondence was enormous. In former days she had hated the trouble of writing letters; now she wrote incessantly, and her little writing-desk seemed to be always on her knee. In the old days she had disliked talking about any serious topic, now politics absorbed her mind, and the most intricate threads of diplomacy were in her hands.

In August, much against his will, Fersen followed the Austrian Court to Prague. He was getting tired of dangling round the Emperor's ministers, and he was anxious to get back to Brussels, where he could do more useful work.

All this time the King of Sweden was plying him with letters concerning various designs for landing troops in France.

While the Court was at Prague, Leopold went to meet the King of Prussia at the castle of Pilnitz, and there the two sovereigns set forth a vague *Declaration*, threatening to invade France unless the King were restored to his old rights and privileges.

This Declaration by no means satisfied

Fersen, for to his mind a threat, not backed up by the force of arms, was of little use, and he groaned over the slow and cautious policy of Austria. "I see their plan," he writes: "they mean to do practically nothing during the winter, and to see if something cannot be arranged during that time. They will only do something definite next spring, if it is necessary. It is shameful and dreadful for the Queen."

By September 1791 the newly-framed Constitution, over which the Assembly had been working so long, was drawn up and submitted to the King.

Mme Elisabeth writes to a friend: "The Constitution is in the hands of the King since Saturday, and he is reflecting on the answer he will make. We must ask the Holy Spirit to give him of His gifts; he has great need of them."

All Europe was curious to know whether the King would accept the Constitution.

Fersen writes to Taube in September:

"I don't know whether it is through jealousy or aversion that the Emperor delays and drags on affairs; I believe him personally well disposed, but his Minister * keeps

* Kaunitz.

him back—and he has not the strength to withstand him. . . . They will wait and see if the King of France accepts the Constitution, then consult all the Courts again, to know what they think. . . . Their plan is to gain time, and not to act till the spring."

Much against his will the King accepted the Constitution. As the Queen wrote to the Empress of Austria: "The King has accepted the Constitution, not because he thought it good, or even workable, but to prevent worse troubles and ills in the kingdom which would take place had he refused it."

To her friends Marie Antoinette did not disguise her aversion to the Constitution, which she called "a tissue of impracticable absurdities."

During his secret mission to Vienna and Prague Fersen had not deemed it prudent to correspond with the Queen. Meanwhile she was getting anxious about him, and wrote to the Austrian Minister Esterhazy, asking for news of her friend.

On September 26 she wrote herself to Fersen:

"For two months I have had no news of you, and no one could tell me where you

were. I should have written to Sophie,* if I had known her address; she would have told me where you were. . . . [Here follow eight obliterated lines.] Our position is changed since the King's acceptance [of the Constitution]. To refuse it would have been more noble, but this was impossible under our circumstances. . . . The follies of the Princes and the Emigrants have also forced our hand. It was essential to remove all doubt of our good faith by accepting. . . . So soon as you arrive in Brussels let me know. I will write to you quite easily, for I have a sure means always at my disposal."

To this letter Fersen answered on October 10:

"At last I am back.† I am sorry you have been forced to accept [the Constitution], but I feel your position—it is dreadful; and there was nothing else to be done. The Empress of Russia, the kings of Prussia, Naples, Sardinia, and Spain are all right, especially the three first. Sweden will sacrifice herself for you. England assures us of her neutrality. The Emperor‡ is the least willing, he is weak and indiscreet. . . . Here are a few questions which

* Fersen's sister. † In Brussels.
‡ Of Austria.

it is necessary for you to answer. To make things shorter I have numbered them, and you can indicate them by 1, 2, 3.

"1. Do you intend to go sincerely into the Revolution? and do you think there is no other course open?

"2. Do you wish to be assisted, or do you wish all negotiations with the Courts to be relinquished?

"3. Have you any plan? If so, what is it?

"Forgive all these questions—I flatter myself that you will see in them only my desire to serve you, and a proof of my unbounded devotion and attachment."

A regular correspondence between the Queen and the Count continued from this time till the Royal family's imprisonment in the Temple, when the writing and receiving of letters became an impossibility. The most elaborate precautions had to be taken with their correspondence. A cipher was used out of the well-known book *Paul et Virginie*. In between the ciphered lines important news was conveyed by means of invisible ink. The letters had to be heated before a fire and then washed in a specially prepared water in order for the invisible ink to become legible. Sometimes their letters were concealed in a

box of tea or biscuits, sometimes in a packet of chocolate, or folded in the binding of a revolutionary book.

The Queen's letters were generally addressed to

M. L'ABBÉ DE BEAUVERIN,
Poste Restante,
Bruxelles.

Having completed the great work of framing a Constitution, the National Assembly dissolved itself at the end of September, and the new Legislative Assembly met on October 1. A brighter prospect seemed to dawn in the political world. All the factions in the new Assembly—which was composed of the young and rising generation of France—were loyal to the new Constitution.

If only the King had loyally accepted the Constitution and the obligation it laid upon him to put away all thoughts of foreign aid all might have been well. But he and the Queen misunderstood the situation. Not that they wanted a foreign invasion—they saw only too clearly the danger of such a step. What they desired was, a foreign *Congress* to be held near the frontier, which would make certain demands of the French Government.

and *back up* these demands, if necessary, by an armed force. In short, they asked for Arbitration, and a foreign invasion was to be the last resource if arbitration should fail.

Marie Antoinette wrote to her brother in November: "No, I should not dream of having recourse to violent measures—violence would only perish by violence. This is the gist of all my letters, and the reason why I want a *Congress* so much."

Again she writes: "I persist always in the idea that the Powers should treat with the Government backed up by a force; but I think it would be extremely dangerous to give the appearance of *invasion*."

To bring the past vividly before one there is nothing like the reading of old letters. In every letter the personalities of two people are wrapped up, and it is this personal touch which makes an old letter a living thing, and of more value to the historian than any other channel of information. The following extracts from the correspondence between the Queen and Fersen may convey to the reader a better impression of the events during the autumn of 1791 than anything else:

Fersen to Marie Antoinette

"I have not yet had time to decipher the first part of your letter. It is the fear of our being compromised that has prevented me from writing to you. At present I am overwhelmed with correspondence. I cannot return to Sweden, for I have all the correspondence to do for the King." *

Marie Antoinette to Fersen

"*Oct.* 19.

"We find it impossible to make the writing † of B. come out on the paper, and with the water the Comte de Coigny has brought us. Tell me at once—by post—how to use that prepared water. . . . Make your mind easy. I am not going over to the extremists. If I have relations with any of them it is only to make use of them. They inspire me with too much horror for me ever to belong to their party. . . . All is quiet here for the moment, but this tranquillity just rests on a thread, and any minute the people are ready to commit horrors. . . . You don't mention your health ? . . . Mine is good."

* Of Sweden. † With invisible ink.

Fersen to Marie Antoinette

"*Oct.* 25, 1791.

"Staël says horrible things of me; he has bribed my coachman, and taken him into his service; this has worried me. He has turned many people against me—who blame my conduct and say that I have acted from ambition solely, and that I have ruined you and the King. . . . They are right in one way. My ambition was to serve you, and I shall regret all my life that I did not succeed. I wished to discharge a part of the obligation which was so dear to me, and I wished to prove that a man may be attached to personages like yourselves without any interested motives. My conduct should have proved to them that this was my only ambition, and that the glory of having served you was my dearest reward. My horses have arrived.* I hear that you have seen the wife of my *valet-de-chambre*! How good you are! but I ought to be accustomed to that!"

Marie Antoinette to Fersen

"*Oct.* 31, 1791.

"Our home life is a hell. It is impossible with the best intentions in the world to say

* Those that took their Majesties to Bondy.

anything. My sister * is so indiscreet, so surrounded by schemers, and above all, so entirely ruled by her brothers from the outside, that there is no use in talking—it would be nothing but arguments all day ! . . . We must show what is our real situation, and what our wishes are, by proving that the only course for us to pursue is to gain the people's *confidence*—that, in fact, it is necessary to do this in view of any plan whatsoever ; that in order to do this we must all act together, and that as the Powers will not be able to come to the aid of France in strength this winter, the only resource is a *Congress*, which would collect and unite all available resources for the spring. It is only from abroad that our salvation can come, for nothing is to be done with this Assembly—it is a mob of scoundrels, madmen, and fools."

The Queen's thoughts were constantly with her absent friend. She could not help feeling anxious about him, for his well-known devotion to the Royal family made his position a dangerous one.

Fersen reassures her about himself in a

* Madame Elisabeth sided with the policy of Monsieur, who had a strong influence over her.

letter written on November 26: "As for me, have no fears; I am now of no account to the French. I serve the King of Sweden, and I do not mix myself up at all with the French. . . . I really do not run any risks."

It was now more than ever Fersen's sole aim and joy in life to render what service he could to the Queen, and with this end in view no risks were too great for him to run, no work was too hard for him to undertake on her behalf.

Mr. Nisbet Bain, in his most interesting book *Gustavus III and his Contemporaries*, well describes Fersen's devoted service to the Queen. "There is something inexpressibly pathetic," he says, "in Fersen's unwearied and unrequited devotion to Marie Antoinette at this period; and the infinite tact with which he not only defended the Queen against the insinuations of her numerous enemies, but also saved her from the consequences of her own impulsiveness; the inexhaustible patience with which he made the most complicated questions clear and plain to her, and the gentle firmness with which he guided her step by step along her ever-darkening path, are perhaps unexampled in the annals of unselfish loyalty."

The end of 1791 found no great change in the position of affairs. England refused to join the coalition against France. George III wrote to the King of Sweden: "My conduct with regard to the troubles which are agitating the kingdom of France has been guided by the principles of a strict neutrality. . . . As a result of these principles I do not intend to take any part in the measures which the other powers may adopt."

Leopold's attitude was still that of "wait and see." Writing to his sister the Archduchess Marie Christine, he says: "Do not do anything the French ask you to do. Just show them civility, and give them dinners—but don't offer them troops or money. I am sorry for their position, but they only think of their romantic schemes, and of their personal interests and vengeances. They imagine that we must all sacrifice ourselves for them."

Gustavus still remained the zealous champion of the Counter-Revolution, and moved heaven and earth to induce the other Powers to take active steps. His thoughts ran incessantly on "*cette pauvre France*" and on all her disorders; he was ready to make any sacrifice for her relief. His own people, however, by no means approved of his quixotic

schemes. His misgovernment had brought Sweden to a state approaching bankruptcy, and a national deficit of £70,000 stared him in the face. It seemed to the people of Sweden sheer madness for the King to embark under such circumstances in a war which, after all, only concerned a foreign country.

His unpopularity increased, and many of the discontented nobles began to hatch dark plots against his life, with the conviction that they were rendering their country the truest service.

With the best intentions in the world Gustavus gave the worst possible advice to the King and Queen of France. In December 1791 he wrote to Marie Antoinette:

"I beg your Majesty to consider that violent evils are only cured by violent measures. . . . The King of France can only re-establish his kingdom by regaining his ancient rights—all other remedies are illusions. . . . It is by the *sword* that the King has been robbed of his rights—it is by the sword that they must be reconquered. But I must stop. I must remember that I am speaking to a princess who has shown the most intrepid courage in the most terrible moments of her life."

The position of the Royal family in Paris was becoming more intolerable every day. The Queen was full of sad forebodings.

"Do you grasp my position and the part that I have to play all day long?" she writes to Fersen in December 1791. "I do not understand myself, and at times I am obliged to reflect if it is really I that am speaking. But what would you have me do? . . . My health is better than I dared to expect, with all this incessant mental strain and the absence of fresh air. I have constantly people to see and letters to write, and all my spare time is devoted to my children. This last but not least of my occupations procures me my one pleasure. When I am very sad I take my little son in my arms and gain comfort for a moment in his embrace. Adieu. The idea of the chocolate is excellent; it is doubly useful to you, and I will use it with prudence sometimes this winter."

Did the Queen look forward to brighter prospects in the coming year? Did she see any gleam of silver in the clouds that were looming each day more threateningly on the horizon? For some time after Varennes all her hopes seem to have turned into dust and ashes. A curious dream she had reflects her

state of mind at this period. She related it to Mlle Bertin, her dressmaker:

"I dreamt, my dear Rose," she said, "that you were bringing me quantities of different coloured ribbons, and that I was choosing some, but directly I fingered them they all turned into black. I threw them back into your boxes with terror; I took up others—green, white, lilac, all colours—but the same thing happened, and as soon as they came into my hands they all became black."

CHAPTER XI

1792

Fersen goes to Paris—His interview with the King and Queen—He lays before them plans for their escape—The Queen gives him details of the return journey from Varennes—Fersen's farewell to the Queen—His return journey to Brussels—His letters to the King of Sweden and Baron Taube.

It was nearly six months since Fersen had seen the Queen. All that time he had been working strenuously for the Royal family, exerting every effort on their behalf, and devoting himself with boundless zeal and untiring energy to "the cause."

As he wrote to his father: "The confidence with which I have been honoured by the King and Queen of France makes it a duty not to forsake them, but to continue to work in their interest as long as I can possibly serve them. The whole world would blame me were I to act otherwise. I was the only person taken into their confidence, and I may yet be able to assist them by my knowledge

of their position and of their views with reference to the state of France. I should for ever reproach myself for having helped to bring about their present unhappy condition if I did not use every means in my power to extricate them from it."

A longing now came over Fersen to see the Queen's face once more—even if it were but a fleeting glimpse. He wanted to hear from her own lips the sad story of Varennes; and he longed to tell her of all his plans—what he had already done, and what he still hoped to do for her.

As early as November he had written suggesting to come and see her: "Answer me if it be possible for me to come and see you quite alone and without servants, should I receive an order to do so from my King, who has hinted to me his wishes on this subject."

To this the Queen replied: "It is absolutely out of the question for you to come here at the present moment; it would only be risking our happiness, and believe me when I say this, for I have an extreme desire to see you."

In a short time, however, the Queen seems to have changed her views on the subject, for on January 21, 1792, Fersen notes in his *Journal*: "The Queen consents that I go

to Paris. . . . My journey to Paris fixed for February 3rd."

On January 24 he writes to the Queen: "I shall make all my arrangements to arrive on the 3rd, at six o'clock in the evening." It must be remembered that the Count ran a very grave risk in going to the French capital. His share in the flight to Varennes was well known, and the Revolutionists would have shown him scant mercy had he fallen into their hands. But what were all the dangers in the world to Fersen when there was any chance of serving the woman he loved?

The Queen was terrified at the grave risks her friend was going to take. Twice she wrote imploring him to postpone his visit, because a strict decree about passports had just been issued, and Paris was in a particularly suspicious mood.

Fersen notes in his *Journal*:

"*Sunday, Jan. 29th.*—A letter from the Queen begging me to postpone my journey till the decree about passports is passed, and quiet is restored in Paris. People there are talking about the King's flight. The papers say he will go by Calais. This is the fruit of French indiscretion! Those who devised a project for the King's escape went talking

about it to everybody, and of course the spies got hold of it."

"*Friday, Feb. 3rd.*—A letter from the Queen saying it is impossible to come, because of the 'individual passports,' and that the plan must be given up. This is very bad news for me, and it is unfortunate for their affairs. On the pretext of suspecting the King's flight a great fuss was made in Paris, the King's new guards were not allowed to take up their duties, and the decree about passports was passed."

Fersen's bitter disappointment can be imagined, but it was soon relieved by a fresh letter from the Queen:

"*Feb.* 6.—I made up my mind to go to Paris after a letter from the Queen telling me that the decree about passports will after all not be sanctioned."

Fersen's journey to Paris cannot be better and more graphically described than by extracts from his own *Journal*:

"*Feb.* 10, *Friday.*—I have made all my arrangements to start.

"*Feb.* 11, *Saturday.*—Started at 9.30 in a post-chaise with Reutersvaard * and no servant. We had passports as couriers to

* Reutersvaard was a trusted Swede, often employed on confidential business by the King of Sweden.

Portugal under fictitious names. The letters and the Memorandum of the King of Sweden to the King of France were enclosed in an envelope to the Queen of Portugal. . . . For safety's sake I also had a letter of credit as Minister of the Queen of Portugal. At eight o'clock we arrived at Tournai, where we slept.

"*February* 12, *Sunday*.—We left at 3.30 a.m. The evening before Reutersvaard had seen M. d'Aponcourt, the commandant, . . . who had taken him for a Swedish courier, and had told him that he could not possibly arrive in Paris before at least fifteen days, as he would be stopped everywhere. At Orchies nothing was said to us; we breakfasted at Bouchain, dined at Bonavis, and slept at Gournai; our chaise broke down at Peronne, which delayed us for four hours. We arrived at Gournai at half-past one in the morning. I kept myself out of sight and wore a wig. Everywhere we were treated civilly, especially at Peronne, even by the National Guards.

"*February* 13, *Monday*.—Very fine and mild. Left at 9.30. Stayed two hours at Louvres to dine; arrived in Paris at 5.30 p.m., without any mishap or questions. Left my officer * at the Hôtel des Princes, Rue de

* Reutersvaard.

THE TUILERIES.

Richelieu. Took a cab to go to Gog: * Rue de Pelletier. The cabby did not know the street. Feared we should not find it. Another cabby then showed us the way. Gog not at home. Waited in the street till 6.30. Still he had not arrived. I became anxious. Went back to join Reutersvaard. He had not been able to get a room at the Hôtel des Princes, —and they could not tell me where he had gone. Returned to Gog's house. Still not come home. Waited about in the street. He arrived at 7. They had only got my letter at noon that day; he was out then, and they had had no opportunity of giving it to him. Went to the Queen by my ordinary way. Afraid of National Guards. Did not see the King."

Fersen laid before the Queen the letter and Memorandum from the King of Sweden which he bore, containing two carefully drawn up schemes for the Royal family's escape. The following day he had a longer interview with the King and Queen.

"*February* 14, *Tuesday.*—Very fine and mild. Saw the King at six o'clock in the evening. He refuses to go—indeed he cannot, if he would, on account of the strict watch over him; but the truth is, he has scruples

* Baron de Goguelat.

about going, having so often pledged himself to stay, and he is an honest man. However, he consents to this: that when the armies arrive he will let himself be guided by smugglers to the woods and there be met by a troop of light horse.

"He wishes the Congress to insist on all his demands. Should they be granted by the Assembly he wants the Congress to stipulate for his removal to some fixed place. Should the Assembly refuse his demands, he consents to the Powers acting, and submits to all the dangers incurred thereby. . . . He was wearing the *cordon rouge*. He sees that there is no other resource but force—but he is weak enough to think it is impossible for him ever to regain all his authority. I proved to him the contrary, and I told him that with force it could be done, and that all the Powers were of the same mind. He agreed, but I am not at all sure that he will not be tempted to treat with the rebels. He said to me: 'Well! well! here we are by ourselves, so we can speak plainly. I know that I am taxed with weakness and indecision, but no one surely has ever found himself in such a position as mine! I know I missed my opportunity on July 14. I should have escaped them,

and I wanted to do so, but what was I to do when Monsieur himself begged me not to go, and when the Maréchal de Broglie, who was commanding, said: "Yes, we can go to Metz, but what are we to do when we get there?" I missed the chance, and it has not returned since. I have been abandoned by every one.' He begged me to warn the Powers not to be astonished at anything he might be obliged to do. 'They must just put me on one side and let me alone,' he said. . . .

"The Queen told me that she had seen Alexandre Lameth and Duport,* that they had told her over and over again that the only remedy was in foreign arms, otherwise all would be lost, that this state of things could not go on and that they themselves had gone much further than they wished."

The Queen confided in her friend that she mistrusted these advisers and that she strongly suspected them of being influenced by jealousy of the Assembly, where they were counted as nobodies. She confessed, however, to making use of them, even while distrusting them. The Queen, in fact, was playing a double game just then. While secretly ne-

* Influential members of the Assembly, and on the Moderate side.

gotiating with the foreign Courts for aid she was to all appearance supporting the Constitutional party, and posing as a champion of the Constitution. These were dangerous tactics; they eventually proved quite useless, and only added to her difficulties and to her unpopularity. Fersen excuses her policy in the following letter to his friend Baron Taube:

"The Queen is not the dupe of those rascals with whom she is forced to treat. She knows them for what they are worth. . . . The *rôle* which you want her to play, viz. that of making the world believe she approves of the Constitution, is exactly that which she has adopted; but when this very Constitution is attacked from all parts, and when the republicans are doing all they can to upset and take away the last shreds of authority left to the King, it is only natural that the Queen should do all she can to maintain the Constitution, and that the Constitutional party, knowing her ascendancy over the King, should turn to her for help to gain their ends; so the Queen, not to betray herself, cannot get out of treating with them, distasteful though it is to her to adopt this course. If you knew her as I do, my friend, and all the details of

her circumstances, far from blaming her, you would be forced to admire her courage."

Marie Antoinette confided to Fersen some interesting details about her terrible return journey from Varennes. The Count noted them in his *Journal*:

"The Queen gave a slice of the beef *à la mode* which I had put into the carriage to a man. A voice cried: 'Don't eat it! Don't you see they want to poison you?' The Queen ate some herself on the spot and gave a piece to the Dauphin. . . . Pétion told them he knew all about their flight: that they had hired a hackney coach near the *Château* driven by a Swede called . . . (here he pretended not to know my name and asked the Queen if she knew it). She replied, 'I am not in the habit of knowing the names of hired coachmen.'"

On Tuesday, February 15, Fersen set out for Tours to give colour to his pretended "mission" to Portugal. It was necessary to make this *détour* to avoid suspicion. On February 19 he returned to Paris by another route, arriving at six o'clock in the evening. Not venturing to show himself till it was quite dark, he sent a little note to the Castle to ask whether there were any further orders

for him. The summons came to present himself to their Majesties that evening.

His *Journal* says:

"I accompanied Gog. to take leave of the King and Queen. The Queen told me that the reply to the disagreeable memo drawn up by Barnave, Duport, and Lameth, which had been sent to the Emperor, had just arrived, and was hateful. I took tea and supper with them. At midnight I left them."

The significance of that midnight parting is by no means conveyed in Fersen's brief words. Here was a parting of the ways for these two. They were never to meet again. She, the woman, was about to take the road to death, and her Calvary was not far off; he, the man, was to tread from that time the long road of trouble and disappointment, shadowed by the lifelong sorrow of her death.

It was an everlasting adieu for them both, though they knew it not. They hoped it was only Au revoir.

. . . . .

The return journey to Brussels was safely accomplished after a few adventures. Fersen and Reutersvaard drove in a small light carriage drawn by three horses. The weather was snowy and the roads were bad and

slippery, which considerably delayed them. Fersen describes a little adventure they had at a small village near Marchiennes: "I was awakened by the carriage stopping and a man asking Reutersvaard for his passport. I pretended to be asleep. After having looked at it for five minutes he said it was worthless—that it had '*by the King*' and not '*by the law*' written on it—that it was not right. Reutersvaard got angry and said: 'But it is the Minister's passport. He knows how they ought to be done, and our Minister would not have given us a passport that was not in due form.' The man persisted. 'It is not like the model we have—it is worth nothing.' Then the postilion, who had seen the courier's badges, said: 'But don't you see, sir, that these gentlemen are couriers? You have no right to stop them!' 'Certainly not!' added Reutersvaard: 'we are Swedish couriers—there it is in the passport.' The fool had not yet discovered it, and when he saw Reutersvaard becoming polite he became insolent. He told us not to be surprised if we were stopped at Marchiennes. So we were, at the only entrance to the town, by a sentinel in a grey jersey. . . . When we told him we were couriers and showed him our passports he let

us go." It was with feelings of relief that Fersen reached Brussels in safety on February 27. He writes: "My joy was great on finding myself at home after having succeeded so well."

A few days after his arrival he despatched the following letter to the King of Sweden:

"BRUSSELS, *Feb.* 29, 1792.

"SIRE,

"Baron Taube must already have had the honour of laying before Your Majesty all the details of my journey; it is therefore useless for me to repeat what he has told you. . . . I found the King and Queen much touched by all the interest you take, Sire, in their affairs. They charged me to convey to Your Majesty their profound gratitude. The remembrance of all that you have done will always be precious to them. They quite see that matters would be pushed on, and the goodwill of their friends be facilitated, by another flight . . . but Their Majesties are convinced that success would be impossible just now, and though I put before them all possible ways and means, I am bound to admit that, owing to the extreme vigilance which prevails everywhere, I think this flight

impossible. The Queen sees quite clearly all the good reasons in favour of flight, and she assured me that the failure of the first attempt would by no means prevent them from making a second effort; but at the present moment Their Majesties do not see the slightest chance of success, therefore they absolutely refuse to discuss the matter. . . . All that the King told me, of the lonely position in which he finds himself, with no one to advise him, and far away from those whose attachment he could rely on, moved me to tears. . . . I found the King and Queen ready to suffer anything rather than the position they are now in, and from my conversation with Their Majesties I can assure you, Sire, they feel strongly that all negotiations with the rebels are utterly useless, and that the only means of re-establishing their authority is by force and foreign help."

A letter to Baron Taube, written about the same time, is of interest:

"BRUSSELS, *Feb.* 29, 1792.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"I have been back here since the day before yesterday, and I found your letters of Jan. 26th and Feb. 2nd awaiting me. I

left here on the 11th, and arrived in Paris without any difficulty on the 13th at six o'clock in the evening. I saw Their Majesties that evening, and also the following day, at midnight. To avoid suspicion, I then had to leave Paris and go as far as Tours, returning via Fontainebleau. I got back to Paris on the 19th at six o'clock in the evening. I dared not risk going to the Palace, but I wrote to ask if they had any commands for me. I left Paris on the 21st at midnight. They had warned me I should find great difficulty in getting out of the city, because of the passports the Municipality demands, and I heard that a number of people had been arrested on this score. I spoke about the matter to the *chargé d'affaires*. He furnished me with two couriers' passports. . . . I had to remain in concealment for some time, which delayed my departure. I was stopped several times on the way, but not recognised, though I had to undergo a severe scrutiny. In a tiny little village they wanted to stop us, as there was not the proper 'description' on the passports, and it was only by saying we were strangers and couriers that they let us go, after keeping us for an hour. It is impossible for my journey to Paris ever to be known.

"On the whole I am fairly satisfied with my mission, though I could not bring about what the King * desires. Flight is physically impossible just now, because of the extreme surveillance that exists. They (the King and Queen) are never left out of sight, and every ship leaving the coast is searched.

"I have brought back other news that may please the King, details of which I will send by the next courier."

* Of Sweden.

CHAPTER XII

1792

The assassination of Gustavus III—Fersen's grief at the King's death—Death of the Emperor Leopold—The policy of the *émigrés*—The Declaration of War—The plans of Dumouriez—The critical situation of the Royal family—The King uses his Veto—The 20th of June—Lafayette's effort on behalf of the King—The suspense of July—The Fête of the Federation—The Queen's hopes of rescue—The Duke of Brunswick's Manifesto—The French nation declared to be in danger—The desperate situation of the Royal family.

On the evening of March 16, 1792, the King of Sweden was sitting at supper in a little ante-room of the Opera House at Stockholm, with his friend Baron Essen and one or two gentlemen of his Court. It was about eleven o'clock, and the party intended to go to the masked ball in the grand *salon* of the Opera House after their meal. The King appeared to be in excellent spirits. The recent Diet of Gèfle had proved far more satisfactory than he had anticipated, consequently he was in

a most cheerful frame of mind, and chatted gaily with his friends as they sat at table. Presently a page entered with a letter, which he handed to the King. One of the guests, peeping over the King's shoulder, observed it was a pencilled note written in a large, rather illiterate hand. Gustavus opened it carelessly, glanced at it, knit his brows, and then read it again more attentively. It ran: "Though I am not one of your friends, yet I do not wish to be among the number of your enemies, who are more than you may imagine. Gustavus! mark these words! . . . If you go to the ball to-night you will be assassinated! Death and destruction await you! Reject not this timely notice!"

With a smile the King thrust the letter into his pocket, and resumed his conversation. It was not until he was putting on his mask and domino in the adjoining dressing-room that he showed the mysterious note to Essen. The Baron was greatly alarmed, and implored his master to give up the ball and to return quietly to the palace. But Gustavus only laughed at his fears. Essen begged him at least to wear a coat of mail under his cloak; there could be, he said, no harm in so simple a precaution. But the King would not listen to

him, and putting on his mask and Venetian domino he took his friend's arm and slipped into his private box. For at least a quarter of an hour the two watched the scene in the ball-room below. At last the King became impatient to join the masquerade. "Come!" he said, "they have lost a good opportunity of shooting me. Let us go down: the ball seems to be a gay one. Let us see whether they will dare to kill me!"

Leaning on his friend's arm, the King entered the great *salon*, where the dancing was in full swing. Essen's anxiety grew as he heard a general whispering, and was conscious of a suppressed excitement among the guests as they entered. A murmur of "Here comes the King!" ran through the room. Indeed, he was not hard to recognise, for the decorations on his breast peeped out from under his silk cloak, and his features were distinguishable under his half-mask. Gustavus did not remain long in the ball-room. The letter had produced a vague uneasiness in his mind, though he would never have owned to such a feeling, for whatever his faults may have been, he was certainly no coward.

Just as he and Essen were about to leave the ball-room a throng of black dominos

pressed round them, almost hemming them in. One of the masques tapped the King on the shoulder and said gaily: "Bonjour, beau masque!" Immediately there was a loud report, followed by a general panic and confusion. Cries of "Fire! fire! save yourselves!" came from all parts of the Opera House.

The King had been wounded in the back, just above the left hip, and as he fell to the ground he shouted: "I am wounded! Arrest him!" The doors of the hall were immediately closed, and all the guests were ordered to unmask and give their names as they filed out.

The last of the guests sauntered in a leisurely way to the door, and carelessly removed his mask. "I hope, sir, you will not suspect me!" he said jokingly to the police officer on duty. "On the contrary!" said the guard, laughing. "I believe you are the man!" This was said in pure jest, but the guard noticed a disturbed expression on the man's face. He was Ankarström, the assassin of the King!

Meanwhile Gustavus had been supported by Essen and others to an ante-room, where he was laid upon a couch. A grey mantle

was hastily wrapped round him; it soon became soaked in blood. The sufferer was calm and even cheerful.

"Don't be so alarmed!" he said to one of his friends who had rushed to him with a scared white face; "you know from experience what a wound is, and I feel no pain at all."

On trying to rise he became very faint, and presently was conveyed back to the Palace in his coach, attended by three of his faithful friends. News of the dastardly deed had spread through the town, and crowds of sorrowing people lined the streets and followed the carriage on its sad return journey. Gustavus jestingly remarked, "it was like the procession of the Pope from the Vatican to St. Peter's!"

The doctors were summoned and the wound was probed—an agonising proceeding for the King. The case was pronounced to be a serious one, but every hope was held out of the royal patient's recovery.

Many of his faithful nobles—who had long been alienated from him for political reasons—now hastened to their sovereign's bedside to assure him of their loyalty and their horror of the dastardly deed.

GUSTAVUS III., KING OF SWEDEN.

The King welcomed them with a glad smile. "I do not at all regret this accident," he said to them, "since it procures me the pleasure of being reconciled to so many of my faithful nobles."

Count Frederick Fersen was among those who hastened to the King's bedside. Grasping him warmly by the hand, Gustavus said to him: "Although we have differed in opinion, I was quite sure that you would be the first person I should see beside me."

In his sickness the King's thoughts were constantly with the Royal family of France. "This shot will rejoice your Jacobins in Paris," he said to a French gentleman by his side, "but write to the Princes that if I get over it my zeal for their just cause will in no way be altered."

On March 25 the King's condition, which had been fairly satisfactory, suddenly changed for the worse. He showed signs of feverishness and excitement, respiration became very difficult, and it was soon evident to the doctors that mortification was setting in. From that day he rapidly sank; he died on March 28, in the forty-sixth year of his age and the twenty-first of his reign.

"Here ended," says M. Geffroy in his inter-

esting book on Gustavus III, "in gloom and sadness one of the most brilliant and chequered careers of the eighteenth century. High soarings checked by irregular flights; far-reaching designs erratically pursued; a few gleams of triumph and success, followed by disillusion and misfortune—such is the *résumé* of this King's reign.

"A mirage constantly beckoned him to light and civilisation, but his vanity inspired him with a thirst for personal triumphs, and he neglected the dry and prosaic duties of government."

Axel Fersen was profoundly grieved at the death of his sovereign, to whom he was devotedly attached. Writing to Marie Antoinette after the sad event, he says: "You will have already received the terrible and overwhelming news of the King's death. You lose in him a strong supporter and a good ally; while I have lost a true friend and protector. It is a cruel loss."

And to his friend Taube he writes: "I cannot console myself after this terrible loss. Every day my grief is renewed; the remembrance of his kindnesses will never leave me. My God! oh that I could render him now my homage! You know the pleasure

it would give me to have his portrait if possible."

Early in March that year another European sovereign had died—viz. the Emperor Leopold of Austria. His death was so sudden that the rumour spread he had been poisoned. Fersen writes in his *Journal*:

"Some say that he died of inflammation of the lungs, others that on the 24th he had an attack of colic—that he was bled three times, but that the attack came on again on the 2nd, and that he died in the most awful convulsions. They seem to think he was poisoned. . . . In all classes the Emperor's death seems to have produced little effect."

In writing to the Queen he says: "We learnt last night of the Emperor's death. The news gives pleasure to some and sorrow to others for the delay which it may cause in your affairs. Personally I think it is an advantage for you. . . . The sentiments of the Archduke Francis * have always been favourable to you, and I know he has often deplored the feeble, slow, and undecided conduct of his father. He has a military soul, and he is much more like Joseph than Leopold."

* The new Emperor.

Meanwhile, in France active preparations were being made for war. For a long time the *émigrés* had been busy collecting an army at Coblenz, with the intention of leading a Crusade against the Revolution.

The thought of making war upon their own countrymen did not deter them from what they considered to be a just and sacred cause. The aims and motives which inspired the *émigrés* are well described by M. de Lamartine :

" Allegiance to the throne was the religion of the French nobles ; and the sovereignty of the people appeared to them an insolent dogma against which it was imperative to take arms. To deliver the King from his captivity, rescue him from his impending danger, save the Queen and her children, restore royalty, or perish fighting in the cause, appeared to them the duty of their situation and birth. . . . There was real devotion in the feeling that induced these young and these old men to abandon their rank in the army, their fortunes, their country, their families, to rally round the white flag in a foreign land, to perform the duty of private soldiers, and brave eternal exile, the spoliation pronounced against them by the laws of their country,

the fatigues of the camp, and death and danger on the battlefield."

In the early spring of 1792 Austria and Prussia openly assumed a threatening attitude towards France, and in March the Legislative Assembly forced Louis XVI to send an Ultimatum to the Princes of the Empire, commanding them to disperse the assemblages of emigrants who were making preparations for war in their lands. Austria's reply was a point-blank refusal, and a demand that the French monarchy should be restored on the basis fixed by Royal Decree in 1789.

On April 20, 1792, the King, as nominal head of the French Executive, was forced by the Assembly to declare war against his nephew the King of Hungary (Francis had not yet been crowned Emperor of Austria).

It cost Louis XVI a hard pang to declare war on his rescuers, and tears were in his eyes as he read in a low voice the Declaration:

"I have exhausted every means of maintaining peace, and I now come, in conformity with the terms of the Constitution, to propose to you formally war with the King of Hungary."

On April 19, the Queen writes to Fersen: "The Ministers of the Jacobins make the

King declare war on the House of Austria to-morrow."

Fersen, replying in a letter conveyed in a box of biscuits, writes: "I received the news of the declaration of war yesterday, and I am very glad of it. It is the only means of bringing the Powers to a decision at last."

The French Government set three armies on foot to oppose the invasion. General Dumouriez, a well-known soldier, and a moderate Jacobin, was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, and entrusted with the organisation of the war.

His plan was to send an army into Belgium to incite her to rise against the Austrians, and to prevent a junction between the Austrian and Prussian armies.

Rochambeau and Lafayette, both of American fame, were sent into Belgium at the head of an army with instructions to foment a popular insurrection there, and to induce the Belgians to join with the French against the Austrians.

At this time the French army was in a state of complete disorganisation. Emigration had deprived many of the regiments of their best officers, the cavalry was badly equipped, the arms were insufficient, most of the officers

were young and inexperienced. It seemed impossible that they could ever be a match for the well-drilled and disciplined armies of Prussia and Austria.

Indeed, at first things went badly for the French. Lafayette found it hard to do anything with the raw material at his disposal; he erred on the side of caution and slowness, and the French received two serious checks at Mons and Tournai.

The Belgians refused to rise against their masters, and Dumouriez' plan completely missed fire. As Fersen wrote from Brussels to the Queen: "A thousand Dumouriez would not make this country revolt."

Meanwhile the position of the Royal family in Paris was getting more perilous every day. The war placed them in a most perplexing and difficult situation. The invaders were their friends and allies, from whom they looked for deliverance from their captivity. At the same time the King was still the nominal head of the French Government, and as such he must support his people in repelling the invasion. He was now the hostage of France, and the chance was that his life would be forfeited on the first military reverse.

Fersen realised only too clearly the perilous

position of the King and Queen after the Declaration of War. Writing to Marie Antoinette on June 11, he says: "My God! how your situation distresses me! My soul is in anguish. But try only to stay in Paris, and help will come to you."

In May the Assembly published two famous decrees: (1) That all priests who refused to accept the new civil constitution of the Church should be banished; (2) That an army of twenty thousand men should be summoned to Paris from all parts, to be present at the approaching Fête of the Federation, and then permanently encamp near the capital.

The King, who up till then had been making concession after concession all along the line, now refused absolutely to sanction these decrees. In vain Dumouriez pointed out to him the dangers he was incurring by refusing: the King was unbending on the point—the decrees were altogether against his conscience, and he was resolved to use his prerogative of the Veto.

The dismissal of the Girondist Ministers and the publication of the King's Veto raised a storm all over Paris. The Jacobins actively fomented the agitation, and the result was the famous insurrection of June 20.

The invasion of the Palace that day by an armed mob of two thousand people is too well known to be detailed here. The Queen writes of it to Fersen early in July :

" The 20th was an awful day. It is not only I whom they want ; it is my husband's life, and they don't disguise the fact. He showed a firmness and courage which overawed them for the time, but the danger may recur again any minute.

" I hope you get news of us. Take care of yourself for our sakes, and don't be too anxious about us."

To this Fersen replied on July 11 :

" M. Lasserez and M. Léonard have arrived and given me your letters. I need not tell you what pleasure they gave me. Your courage is splendid, and your husband's firmness has produced a great effect. You must keep each other from yielding to all temptations to leave Paris. If you fly, never go to Lafayette for help. . . . The horrible scenes of the 20th have revolted all Europe."

Lafayette with the army in Belgium was horrified to hear of the outrages committed by the mob on June 20. He hastened to Paris, and, presenting himself at the Assembly, demanded that the authors should be punished,

and that the Royal family should be properly protected. But he found the Assembly composed of violent Jacobins, whose sympathies were in reality with the mob, and his demands were received with coldness.

At the Palace, too, where he presented himself to offer their Majesties his help, he was received with suspicion, and his offers of aid were coldly rejected.

The Queen had always mistrusted Lafayette; besides, she and the King had now definitely broken with the Constitutional party, with whom they had been playing for so long. All their hopes from this time were based on foreign succour. As the warm June days wore on the danger increased.

Fersen was consumed with anxiety, and it was grief and anguish to him that he could not be by the Queen's side in her hour of need. "My anxiety about you is extreme," he writes to her; "I have not a moment's peace."

And again:

"Your position causes me ceaseless anxiety. Your courage will be admired, and the firm conduct of the King will have an excellent effect.* Above all, don't leave Paris. That

* Referring to the King's courage on June 20.

is the chief point. Then it will be easy for them to come to you, and that is the project of the Duke of Brunswick. He will precede his entry * by a strong Manifesto in the name of the allied Powers. . . . Then he will march straight on Paris."

The ominous Fête of the Federation was coming round again, and many feared that it would be marked by terrible events. July 14 was a day of sinister memories for the Royalists.

The Queen writes to Fersen on July 6 :

"A terrible catastrophe is feared on the 14th on the part of the Jacobins. Regicide is preached, and they have dark designs. Their plans are known, so they may come to grief. Jacobins from all parts of the country are arriving here in crowds."

It was feared that an attempt on the King's life would be made at the Champ de Mars on July 14, so a padded waistcoat was made for the King to wear at the ceremony. To please his wife he consented to wear it.

The Fête of the Federation was a gloomy function, auguring nothing but evil for the monarchy. Cries of "*Long live Pétion! À bas le Roi!*" "*À la lanterne les aristocrats!*" greeted the arrival of the Royal family.

* Into France.

The little Dauphin, who was wearing the uniform of the National Guards, innocently turned to his mother and said: "Maman, is M. Pétion, then, King of Paris to-day?"

On the Champ de Mars a huge "Tree of Liberty" was planted. From its branches hung toy crowns, coronets, escutcheons, cardinals' hats and other badges of feudalism, giving the appearance of a ghastly kind of Christmas Tree.

Louis XVI elbowed his way through the yelling, excited crowd up to the Altar of the Country, where he took the national oath.

Madame de Staël, who was an eyewitness of the scene, thus describes it:

"Only a Louis XVI, only a martyr, could have borne himself in such a crisis in such a manner. There was nothing unusual about him, beyond a certain dignity wanting on ordinary occasions; he challenged respect by his mere appearance. I watched from a distance his powdered head, distinguishable from the dark-haired men around him, and his embroidered silk coat, which contrasted with the costume of the crowd, and as he mounted the steps of the altar he looked to me like some holy victim voluntarily offering his life for others."

The Queen was watching the ceremony from a balcony in an agony of suspense.

"The expression of her face will never be effaced from my memory," says Madame de Staël. "Her eyes were swollen with crying, while her magnificent dress and her dignified bearing were in marked contrast to the crowd around her, from whom she was only separated by a few of the National Guard, while the armed men who had gathered in the Champ de Mars gave far more of a revolutionary than festive character to the scene."

The King was invited to set fire to the Tree of Liberty, and thus typify the extinction of feudalism. But he escaped this humiliation by declaring, "Feudalism no longer exists in France."

As the summer wore on the suspense grew, but the Queen buoyed herself up with hope that a speedy deliverance was at hand, and she looked forward to the early arrival of the rescuing armies.

"We shall be free before another moon," she remarked to Madame Campan one moonlight night in July. "I know the plan of campaign of the allies. This day they will be at Verdun—that day at Lille."

To the ever-anxious Fersen she writes:

"Our position is terrible, but don't be over-anxious. I feel hopeful, and something within me tells me that soon we shall be saved and happy. This thought sustains me. . . . Adieu! when shall we see each other again in peace?"

And again:

"Don't distress yourself too much about me. Remember that courage always makes itself felt. What we have been doing will give us time, I hope, to wait; but six weeks is a long time. I dare not write more to you. Adieu! Hasten, if you can, the help promised for our deliverance."

On July 11 Fersen writes to Baron Taube:

"I have received letters from the Queen. She begs that haste may be made, for her position is no longer bearable; unhappily, nothing can be done for her till the troops have arrived. Her letter is full of a supernatural courage, for there is no doubt that she realises the dangers she will run upon the entry of foreign troops—that will be about the beginning of August."

On July 29 a Manifesto, breathing fire and slaughter, was issued by the Duke of Brunswick, Commander-in-Chief of the allied forces. It was an extraordinary document, and it is

small wonder that it roused the French people to the highest pitch of fury.

Here are some of its provisos:

"Any National Guard taken when carrying arms shall be treated as a rebel. All the members of National Assembly, of the Municipality and of the National Guard are rendered responsible for the events, to be judged by military process, without hope of pardon; it is declared that if the least outrage be done to the Royal family, and if their safety be not immediately provided for, their Imperial and Royal Majesties will hand Paris over to a military execution and total overthrow."

It has come to light of recent years, by the publication of Fersen's correspondence, that he was the inspirer of this famous Manifesto, although M. de Limon, an ardent Royalist who had formerly been in the service of the Duc d'Orléans, was held responsible for it.

In a letter to the Queen Fersen confides this fact.

"They are at work over the Manifesto," he writes. "I drew up one for M. de Limon, who gave it to M. de Mercy without telling him it was my work."

And to Taube he writes on July 29:

"My dear friend, I send you the declaration of the Duke of Brunswick. You will be pleased with it. . . . I have drawn it up for M. de Limon. I await with impatience news from Paris. Here is the critical moment for us! May God preserve them!"

The Manifesto had the effect of hastening the crisis towards which everything had been working up for so long.

The Assembly was pressed on all sides by gigantic dangers: an invading army was marching to the capital, threatening fire and the sword; there was utter disunion among the various political factions; on the throne reigned a weak and vacillating King, in open sympathy with the approaching enemy.

The Jacobins, who were now the dominant party in the Assembly, took prompt and vigorous measures to deal with the grave situation.

The nation was proclaimed to be in danger, and all good patriots were called upon to offer themselves for the defence of their country. For this purpose a huge camp of fifty thousand men was formed near Paris, of volunteers from all parts of the kingdom. Thousands flocked

MADAME ELISABETH.

(Reproduced by kind permission of Mrs. Gladstone, Parkstone, Dorset, from a pastel portrait in her possession.)

to the capital to enrol themselves in this emergency army.

The Jacobins now began openly to call for the deposition of the King, and secretly to foment a general rising in Paris.

Madame Elisabeth writes to a friend :

" Our good patriots in the Assembly have just declared the nation to be in danger, in view of the conduct of the Kings of Hungary and Prussia (not to speak of others) towards poor peaceable beings like us. . . . The nation is about to rise as one man."

The Queen, writing to Fersen on August 1, says :

" Evidently the King's life has been threatened for some time, and the Queen's also. The arrival of about six hundred Marseillaises and many deputies from all the Jacobin Clubs increase our anxieties, alas ! only too well founded.

" All sorts of precautions are taken for the safety of Their Majesties, but assassins prowl continually round the *Château* ; the people are excited ; there is bad faith among many of the National Guards, weakness and cowardice among others.

" The only people to resist these rascals are the Swiss Regiments, and a few other persons

who are ready to defend the Royal family with their lives."

Here the Queen evidently refers to the body of gallant noblemen who made their way secretly to the Tuileries at the end of July, and there posted themselves as guards to protect the persons of their beloved sovereigns.

Again she writes frantically to her friend:

"Every day produces some new scene, but all tending to the destruction of the King and his family. . . . Tell M. de Mercy that the lives of the King and Queen are in the greatest danger, and that the delay of one day may cause incalculable harm."

Fersen was in an agony of mind for the Queen after the publication of the Manifesto, for he realised how precarious her position would be until the arrival of the foreign troops.

On July 28 he writes to her:

"The crisis has come, and my soul shudders. May God protect you all! Should it be necessary for you to hide, pray do not hesitate to do so; it might be needful till help comes. If so, there is a cellar in the Louvre, close to M. Laporte's room. It is a safe place, and not well known. You might make use of it. To-day the Duke of Brunswick starts. It

will take him eight or ten days to get to the frontier."

The Queen, who felt herself capable of taking the lead and acting in an energetic manner, bitterly felt the helplessness of her position. The King *could* not lead, and she *would* not.

"I could put myself at the head of the troops," she said to Madame Campan, "but I should only place new weapons in the hands of the King's enemies; cries of anger against the Austrian would be echoed all over France. . . . A Queen who is not a ruler must remain inactive under circumstances like ours, and prepare to die."

The Royal family could not now venture into the Palace gardens for fear of being exposed to threats and insults.

In the very grounds of the *Château* hawkers went about selling abominable pictures representing the Queen as Messalina and the King as Vitellius. Wherever they turned the King and Queen were met with insults—sometimes veiled, often open.

The last time they attended Mass in the Chapel Royal (on August 5) the Choir in singing the Magnificat emphasised in a pointed and insolent way the verse: "*He hath put*

down the mighty from their seat." This was too much for the King. As he left the Chapel his eyes were full of tears, and he murmured sadly: "It seems as if God Himself had turned against us."

CHAPTER XIII

1792–1793

The 10th of August—The massacre of the Swiss Guard—News from the Temple—The capture of Longwy and Verdun—The September massacres—Murder of the Princesse de Lamballe—The retreat of the allied armies—The victory of Jemmapes—The French march on Brussels—Fersen flies to Düsseldorf—The National Convention—Abolition of the Monarchy—The King's fate—His trial—His execution—Fersen's grief.

THE crisis had come! On August 13 Fersen notes in his *Journal*:

"Terrible news from Paris. Thursday morning the Castle was attacked. The King and Queen took refuge in the Assembly. At one o'clock fighting was still going on in the Courts of the Carrousel. Blood flowed in streams, many were killed and hanged. The Castle was forced on all sides. Eight pieces of cannon turned against it. . . . A thick smoke made it seem as if the Castle was on fire! My God! what horrors!"

The next day he received the following

account of what took place on August 10 from the Swedish *chargé d'affaires* in Paris :

" For the present the King and Queen are in safety. No one knew this yesterday. . . . The King is now deprived of all his powers. The Assembly has taken the Royal family under its protection. You will see all details in the papers. Words cannot describe the horrors of yesterday. All Paris heard the firing at the Castle, not knowing the Royal family were with the Assembly. It is reckoned that 700 of the Swiss Guards were massacred by the people, and that 600 of the people, including the Marseillaises, were killed by the fire of the Swiss."

Another letter from Paris was forwarded to him by the Baron de Breteuil, containing further details :

" You will have heard of all the events that took place yesterday. The tocsin and the *générale* sounded everywhere. . . . Careful precautions were taken at the Tuileries till 5 a.m., when various troops arrived ; at 5.30 the King went out to inspect the posts. . . . On his return to the Castle the besiegers arrived by the wicket and put themselves into order for battle in the Carrousel ; they

had ten pieces of cannon, which they turned on the different entrances, but for a long time they were quiet. At eight o'clock the King and all the Royal family were demanded by the Assembly; they went there under a strong escort, which stripped the Castle of many defenders.

"The Maréchal de Mailly commanded at the Castle; no orders were given, and there was much confusion. . . . When the K. went in to the Assembly, the gate of the Castle was forced in . . . the federates in the Court commenced the fray, took possession of the cannon, and called for the Swiss. They began firing, then followed a sharp fusillade from the Castle windows. The federates fled to the Carrousel. Two companies of Swiss descended, went to the great entrance and regained possession of the cannon, but no order was given to support them. . . . As they were not supported, they and the National Guard must have suffered considerably. The number of slain was great and horrors were committed everywhere. . . . The Royal family had to sleep at the Feuillants, where they are kept as hostages."

Fersen's worst fears were realised. The crash had come! The Monarchy, which had

been swaying and tottering for so long, had fallen at last!

In the Hôtel des Princes at Brussels there was a constant hurrying hither and thither of messengers and couriers; the servants were flying here and there; groups of French gentlemen with grave faces were gathered together to talk in anxious whispers; outside in the stables could be heard the constant clatter of horses' hoofs and the steps of bustling grooms.

Axel Fersen moved among them all with a set face and an absent look in his eyes. His thoughts and his spirits were far away in the revolted capital, with her who was in such dire peril.

Fresh items of news filtered in to Brussels every day, all confirming the desperate position of the Royal family in Paris. On August 23 Fersen notes in his *Journal*:

"News from Paris. King and his family shut up in the Tower of the Temple. Mesdames de Lamballe and Tourzel shut up with them."

The Count was well able to picture the grim and gloomy place of their captivity. He had been to the Temple in old days when the Comte d'Artois had lodgings there, and it

came into his mind how the Queen had always instinctively hated the place, and how she had often begged her brother-in-law to pull it down.

On August 23 his *Journal* says: "Mesdames de Lamballe and de Tourzel and five of the Queen's women put into La Force."

What was the reason of this removal? Why was the Queen thus deprived of her faithful ladies and servants? What fate was in store for them? Fersen asked himself a thousand times.

The news from Paris was indeed bad, yet the Royalists had at this time every reason to be hopeful, for the armies of deliverance were marching towards Paris; they had already taken Longwy; and on September 1 Verdun fell into their hands without any serious opposition. The allies were now occupying French soil; a few days' march and they would be in the capital!

Lafayette had been dismissed from his post by the Assembly and replaced by General Dumouriez. He had fled to Holland, but had been taken prisoner on the way by the Austrians, who shut him up in a German fortress.

The surrender of Verdun without a blow,

and the approach of the invading armies, fell on the Parisians like a thunderbolt. In this crisis Danton, the most powerful leader of the Jacobin party, rose to the occasion, and assuming a dictatorship, practically took upon himself the control of affairs. He reasoned thus: The Royalist faction in Paris is in league and sympathy with the invading army, they would aid and abet the foreigners on their arrival in the capital; Paris must therefore be cleansed entirely of this traitorous faction, and there must be a great purgation of the enemies to France. "It is time," he said to the Assembly, "to urge the people to precipitate themselves *en masse* against their enemies; if there were thirty thousand traitors to arrest they must be apprehended to-morrow. *We must strike fear into the Royalists.*"

In cold blood he secretly planned and organised a massacre of all "suspected" persons to take place on September 2. For this terrible purpose he hired a number of cut-throats, and even provided them with carts to carry away the corpses. "I looked my crime steadfastly in the face and I did it," he said afterwards.

On August 29 every house in Paris was searched, and three thousand persons suspected

of royalist leanings were dragged to prison. On September 2 the butchery began, and for nearly five days hell was let loose in Paris. "We must purge the prisons and leave no traitors behind us," was the cry of the people. Danton's hired cut-throats visited the prisons and did their dreadful butchers' work. The bleeding corpses were heaped up in great piles in the courts of the prisons. Shrieking furies (we will not call them women) danced the *carmagnole* round them, and nameless horrors were perpetrated. Paris became drunken with wine and blood. At the Temple the Royal family observed signs of uneasiness among the guards on September 2.

As they went out to take an airing, their ears caught the faint sound of a deep confused roar in the distance. A few stones were flung at them over the wall. The next day they were not permitted to take their usual walk. Louis stood at the window chatting with Danjon, one of the guards, early in the afternoon. Presently a fearful noise of hammering, shrieks and yells was heard outside, and an ugly crowd burst into the courtyard. Surely it was the most fiendish and inhuman mob that had ever darkened the face of the earth. Dragging with them the harrowing

remains of a corpse, they surged into the square yelling and laughing. Some of them swarmed up a rubbish heap beneath the King's window and hoisted aloft the ghastly trophy they had brought—the bleeding head of a beautiful woman stuck on a long pike. In a moment the King recognised the face, still beautiful amidst all this horror. It was the head of the Princesse de Lamballe, his wife's dearest friend. Horrified, he shouted "Prevent the Queen!" but it was too late. Marie Antoinette had seen the gruesome thing, and had fallen to the ground in a dead faint.

Fersen writes in his *Journal*:

"*Sept.* 6.—News from Paris frightful. They say Mme de Tarente is saved.

"*Sept.* 10.—Awful details from Paris. Manuel * said to King when he forced him to look upon the corpse of Mme de Lamballe: 'Look! There may be a Counter Revolution—but at least you won't enjoy it. Here is the fate that awaits you!' . . . All these details make me shudder for the King and Queen. . . . I have never feared so much."

. . . . .

To return to the armies of the allies. Just

* The *procureur* of the Commune.

PRINCESSE DE LAMBALLE.

(Reproduced by kind permission of Mrs. Gladstone, Parkstone, Dorset, from an original pastel portrait in her possession.)

when all seemed to be going so well with them, Fate stepped in and sowed doubt and divisions in their ranks.

When the news of the awful September massacres reached the Duke of Brunswick he hesitated to advance. "Who knows but our first victory will be the signal for the death of the King?" he reasoned.

A letter purporting to come from Louis XVI (Monsieur declares it was forged by the Duc d'Orléans) begged the King of Prussia to make peace, saying that if the allies continued their march to Paris the King's death would be the certain result.

The situation was indeed fraught with difficulties. Louis XVIII in his *Memoires* writes:

"The armies of the Revolution increased after their defeats, while the armies of the conquerors became disorganised after their triumphs. Verdun taken, the Duke of Brunswick, instead of immediately continuing his march, only made a few indecisive movements."

At Valmy the Prussians received a check and were forced to retreat. Want and sickness made themselves felt in the camp of the allies. Letters of a most depressing

nature arrived in Brussels from officers in the Coalition camp. Fersen writes on October 1:

"Several letters have arrived from Vicomte de Caraman and his wife, saying that Dumouriez is in an impregnable position, that the weather is awful, and that the troops are in great want. Houses are burnt down for fuel. . . . The picture drawn by the Vicomte de Caraman of the misery of the natives is appalling. He describes having seen a village all in flames and an old man and his wife sitting before their house, contemplating in gloomy silence the destruction of all they possessed; their dog lying at their feet howling piteously."

A letter from Vauban to his wife gives a terrible picture of the misery of the *émigrés*: they had been in bivouac for the last ten days, without tents, without means of conveyance, afflicted with dysentery, without medical aid or means of relief, absolutely without food; he had eaten his last pound of bread, and knew not where to find another.

Both these letters doubt the success of the enterprise and seem to say, "God knows how it will all end."

The Duke of Brunswick became convinced

that negotiations would do more for the King of France than war.

Taking into consideration the unfavourable conditions of his army, together with the undoubted fact that to advance might imperil the life of Louis XVI, he decided to retreat.

At the same time Dumouriez entered into secret negotiations with the King of Prussia. He guaranteed the Prussians a safe withdrawal to the Meuse—on the condition of their surrendering Longwy and Verdun. So by October 1, 1792, the great Coalition was broken up and the "armies of deliverance" had evacuated French soil.

The news of the retreat filled Fersen's soul with despair. "This retreat is horrible," he writes, "by reason of its consequences. All seems to me to be over for this year. . . . Every one is dissatisfied with the Duke of Brunswick."

In November Dumouriez proceeded with his old plan of invading Belgium. At Jemmapes, on November 6, his troops won a signal victory, which filled the whole of Europe with amazement. It proved to be the turning-point in the War of the Revolution. From that time an extraordinary tide of success set in for the French.

The raw fighting men of the Revolution were fast developing into the finest soldiers in Europe. Inspired by the most intense and almost fanatical patriotism, they seemed to carry everything before them. The whole of Belgium now lay at the mercy of Dumouriez and his troops. The Austrians had evacuated the Netherlands after Jemmapes, and there was nothing to prevent the French from marching straight to Brussels.

A fresh defeat of the Austrians at Mons caused a general panic among the *émigrés* in Brussels. Fersen writes on November 7:

"At nine o'clock the news was made known, and there was general fear and consternation. One might have thought the French were at the gates of the city; one saw nothing but people running about trying to find conveyances to take them away. . . . Fright and stupefaction were visible on all faces. . . . We had fixed our departure for the following day, but M. de Mercy, who came in the evening to see Mme de Sullivan, advised us not to hurry, saying that we had yet three or four days—that he was not, after all, going to Ruremonde, which was a horrid unhealthy place, but that he intended going to Düsseldorf, and he begged us to go there too. That

evening we decided to go there, and to postpone our departure."

On November 9 Fersen left the capital with his friend Colonel Crawford and Mme de Sullivan *en route* for Aix-la-Chapelle. The roads were full of fugitives fleeing, like themselves, from the approach of the Revolutionary armies. Fersen gives an affecting description of the miseries these unfortunate people suffered. "A heart-rending sight," he writes, "was that of the unfortunate *émigrés*; young men and old men of the Bourbon corps lagged behind, hardly able to drag themselves along with their muskets and knapsacks, carrying the few things they had managed to take away. There were ladies, with or without their maids, going on foot, one with a child on her back, another with a small bundle. I longed to have a hundred carriages to pick up all these poor people—it was too dreadful and pitiful to see them."

From Aix he writes to his friend Baron Taube:

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—What a century we are living in! Providence seems to be striking blow after blow to overwhelm the unhappy Royal family. My soul is in anguish. You

were in despair to hear of the Duke of Brunswick's defeat? Well, you will despair yet more to hear that the Austrians have been obliged to leave the Netherlands at the approach of Dumouriez with his pack of thieves and rebels. It is too horrible to think of— especially when one knows all these misfortunes are due to the weakness, the imbecility, and the want of energy of the Government and Duke Albert * who commands the army. . . .

"We have had no fresh details from Paris. . . . They are occupied over the King's trial, but there is reason to think he will not be executed, though most certainly he will be condemned. It is too fearful for me to have to write such horrors, and I am in torment. . . . Among all my other troubles I fear I shall soon have financial ones; all my things in Paris have either been sold or are going to be, and what I left with a gentleman in the Netherlands will probably be plundered by the French. You know, my dear friend, that I have never received a farthing's pay. I did not want any, for the pleasure of serving my King and the King of France amply repays any sacrifices that I have made. But the

* Of Saxe-Teschen.

position is prolonged—my future is now most uncertain, and I have spent a great deal in couriers, etc., sums which can never be repaid to me. God knows I do not regret it, and if when the end comes I can flatter myself with having been of some use to them, I shall regret nothing, and for the present will most willingly embrace any amount of privations."

Meanwhile in Paris the Legislative Assembly had been replaced by the National Convention, a provisional government composed of "out and out" Republicans. The first step of the Convention was to proclaim, on September 21, the abolition of the Monarchy and the establishment of a Republic One and Indivisible."

Then came the question, "What was to be done with the King?" There were divergences of opinion among the members of the Convention, but all agreed that the King should be brought to trial.

Fersen shared the general belief that the result of the trial would be a decree of exile. In writing to the Regent of Sweden at the end of November he says:

"The trial of the King is imminent. . . . There is reason to believe that their intention

is to try the King, condemn him, and then have him pardoned by the Nation, and a certain sum assigned for his support and that of his family; but it is not known whether he is to be kept in prison or left at liberty to go where he pleases."

On December 13, the fugitives at Aix continued their journey to Düsseldorf, where they arrived after many adventures on the 18th. It was a relief to breathe freely again, and not to be haunted by the nightmare of approaching French armies. Here in Switzerland they were in absolute safety and on neutral ground.

On January 2, 1793, Fersen writes in his *Journal*:

"The King went to the bar on the 26th. De Seize read his justification. . . . The King added, with great feeling, that what he felt most was being accused of wishing to shed the blood of his subjects, he who throughout his reign had thought of nothing but their happiness."

It was half-past ten on Sunday evening, January 27, 1793, when a note was brought to Fersen at his lodgings in Düsseldorf. Hastily opening it, he read:

"The Archbishop of Tours has the honour,

according to the wish of the Comte de Fersen, to send him these sad and horrid details of the atrocious crime which would for ever dishonour the French name were it not disavowed by a large number of worthy Frenchmen. Letters from Paris are absolutely silent about the Royal family.

"On the 21st, at 9.30 a.m., the King left the Temple escorted by 400 cavalry and 1,200 infantry. He was taken, in the midst of the deepest silence, by the boulevards of the Temple, St. Martin and St. Honoré, to the scaffold, erected on the former 'Place Louis XV'—now called 'Place de la Révolution'—between the site of the former statue * and the entry to the Champs Elysées.

"Inside the carriage, on the King's left side, was his confessor, an Irish priest; in front two police officers. Having arrived at the foot of the scaffold, he allowed them to tie his hands with perfect *sang-froid*, and he mounted it with courage.

"He wished to address the people, but the drums drowned his voice. However, a few who were near the scaffold heard his words, pronounced with a firm voice: 'I forgive my enemies, and I desire that my death may

* That of Louis XV.

be the salvation of France.' He breathed his last at a quarter to eleven; his severed head was shown to the people. The air resounded with cries of '*Vive la Nation! Vive la République française!*' Several soldiers dipped their pikes into his blood, others their handkerchiefs. His head and his body were taken away and buried in the Madeleine."

. . . . .

For a few minutes Fersen lay back in his chair completely stunned by the news. His imagination so readily pictured the scene: the cold, foggy morning, the beating of the drums, the mournful procession, the phalanx of soldiers, the carriage, and inside the Victim. He could well picture the King's serenity: had not he been a witness of Louis' imperturbable calm at the most terrible moments of his life? Ah! yes! people may have sneered and sniggered at the good King, but after all there had been grand stuff in him, and on his death-day he had shown himself a true hero!

Then his thoughts turned to the anguish of the widowed Queen. Fersen knew that of late sorrow had drawn the husband and wife wonderfully together. How nobly she had supported him and encouraged him in the hour of trial! She had been offered many

chances of escape, but she had always firmly refused to leave her husband's side. She had rejoiced in sharing his dangers, and in the hour of adversity the two had learned truly to love and esteem each other. How bitter must have been the anguish of their parting!

Fersen's mind wandered back to the dear old Trianon days. Visions of the Queen in all her loveliness floated before him as he thought of past times. He saw her in the gardens of Trianon, amongst her friends and in the midst of the flowers she loved so well—a radiant, beautiful woman. And by her side he seemed to see the good-natured King, smiling down upon her with his kind eyes. A thousand memories surged in his mind. With a heavy heart and streaming eyes he took up his pen and wrote in his *Journal*:

"*Jan.* 27, 1793.

"Received this evening at half-past ten from the Archbishop of Tours the sad details of the King's death. Although I was prepared for it, the certainty of such an awful deed renewed all my grief.

"My imagination was tortured with heart-rending memories."

CHAPTER XIV

1793

The Coalition against France—The schemes of Dumouriez—Fersen's hopes for the Queen—His advisory Note to Marie Antoinette—The failure of Dumouriez' plans—The quarrels about the Regency—The overthrow of the Girondists—News of the Royal prisoners in the Temple—The Queen sends a seal to Fersen—The Dauphin is separated from the Queen—Fersen's plans to rescue the Royal family—The Queen is removed to the Conciergerie—News of the Queen in the Conciergerie—The Queen's sentence—Her letter to Madame Elisabeth.

THE whole of Europe was horrified at the execution of Louis XVI.

The Powers that had hitherto hung back from the coalition—viz. England, Spain, and Portugal—now hastened to join the allies. Nearly all Europe took up arms against the Revolution, and only five nations remained neutral.

"The King was executed! Every throne trembled—all the nations recoiled with astonishment and horror from this sacrifice of Royalty." *

* Lamartine.

It was now a war of armed opinions, and young France, with her Revolutionary doctrines, stood with her back to the wall against all the hosts of the Old World.

In England the French ambassador was packed off immediately after the King's exécution, and war was declared.

Catherine of Russia ordered all French persons to quit her dominions within twenty days unless they publicly abjured all revolutionary principles.

General Dumouriez was profoundly shocked and grieved at the King's death. For some time he had been getting more and more disgusted with the excesses of the Revolutionists, and now he determined to associate himself no longer with a party who could go to such fearful lengths. He had happened to come across in Plutarch the lines, "When an action is not honourable it is time to see its shame and renounce it." These words had influenced him strongly, and he definitely made up his mind in the early spring of 1793 to turn against the Convention and to direct all his energies towards saving the Queen.

He formed a scheme of leading his army to Paris, supported by Austrian troops, and

there overthrow the Jacobin Government and restore the Constitution of 1791.

With the utmost caution and secrecy he entered into negotiations with the Austrians.

News of this seems to have leaked out, for on March 30 Fersen writes, "It seems certain that Dumouriez has made proposals to the Prince of Cobourg."

Rumours of Dumouriez' intentions also reached the Convention, and in all haste they sent the War Minister and four deputies to the French camp to summon the General to appear before the Revolutionary Tribunal. For answer Dumouriez told the deputation that he only recognised the Revolutionary Tribunal as a tribunal of blood and crime, and that as long as he had an inch of steel he would not submit to it.

"Well, then," said one of the deputies, "I declare you suspended from all your functions: you are no longer General, and I forbid you to be obeyed."

"This is too much!" cried Dumouriez, and summoning thirty hussars who were posted outside, he said to them: "Arrest these four men, and see that no harm is done them. Arrest also the Minister of War, but leave him his sword."

On April 5 Fersen writes:

"An express sent by the Vicomte de Caraman to the Baron de Breteuil brought news of the agreement made by Dumouriez with the Prince of Cobourg. I sent off an express messenger with the news to Sweden. . . . Now I fear nothing for the Queen. . . . The Maréchal de Broglie heard in the evening that Dumouriez was marching on Paris bearing the white cockade, and that the Prince of Cobourg was at the frontier ready to assist him if necessary."

The delight of the Count and his friends at this report knew no bounds; they deluded themselves with the confident belief that deliverance was at last at hand, and that the Queen's dangers and troubles would soon be over.

The Regent of Sweden wrote enthusiastically to Fersen in answer to his despatch bearing the good news.

"The much-desired moment has come, then," he wrote, "when the delirium of France and her tragic and sanguinary triumphs are about to cease, when at last she will be placed in subjection to her lawful masters. . . . You are a Swede—you love your country; I am your friend, and I have rights over you; I

cannot better intrust the interests of my country than to your hands, and I constitute you *ambassador from the King to Louis XVII.* You will be a better judge than I of the time and the propitious moment for proceeding to Paris, to your destination."

This letter added to Fersen's cup of hope and happiness. His thoughts flew to the arrival of the rescuing armies in Paris, and taking his *rôle* of ambassador to King Louis XVII quite seriously, he prepared a Note for the Queen, advising her how to deal with Dumouriez.

"The position in which you are about to find yourself is very embarrassing," he writes in this "Note" on April 8. "You will have incurred great obligations to a knave, who, as a matter of fact, has only yielded to necessity. . . . But the man is useful, he must be used, and the past forgotten; you must even appear to believe what he will say of his good intentions; you must deal frankly with him respecting the things you may desire, and the re-establishment of the monarchy in its entirety as you would have it."

But Fersen's hopes carried him too far ahead. Just as the tide seemed about to turn, Fate again intervened.

The Count was engaged in the very act of

writing his advisory "Note" to Marie Antoinette when the Bishop of Pamiers came and told him that Dumouriez' army had revolted, that the General had fled from the camp, the soldiers firing their muskets after him, and that he had escaped to the frontier with a few officers of his staff.

This was disheartening news, and Fersen confesses that "all his fears for the Queen were born again." His dearest hopes were again ruthlessly dashed to the ground. It is extraordinary with what persistence an evil fate seemed to pursue the Royalists. As M. Gaulot says: "Nothing that was devised against the Revolution succeeded, and it marched on without a stumble, notwithstanding that its feet were bathed in blood."

Since the King's death the *émigrés* had been quarrelling among themselves about the Regency.

Fersen had written as early as January:

"There are already parties among the French. One set approves of the Regency of Monsieur, the other bears in mind the rights of the Queen; and it is much to be feared that their opinions will have evil results some day. The Princes are already going to make a thousand blunders."

Meanwhile in Paris a great struggle was going on between the Jacobins and the Girondists. The fate of the Queen rested on the issue of this conflict. There was little hope for her if the Jacobins prevailed!

By August her doom was virtually sealed, for the Girondists were completely crushed and their leaders were sent to the scaffold. Paris was now in the hands of the Jacobins, who plunged headlong into the appalling excesses of the Terror. It was then that the guillotine began in grim earnest its deadly work!

Since the King's death the fate of Marie Antoinette had been shrouded in silence and mystery. She and Madame Elisabeth were so closely guarded that it was well-nigh impossible for them to communicate with the outside world.

All kinds of reports were circulated about the Royal family—such as, for instance, the death of little Madame in the Temple, which Fersen notes in his *Journal* of January 30: "Will of Louis XVI superb. Nicholas offers himself for the defence of the Queen. He speaks of the death of little Madame. He has written to the Queen offering his services and has sent his letter to the President of the Convention."

In February Fersen had the joy of receiving a token and a special message from the Queen enclosed in a letter she had written to the Chevalier de Jarjayes :

" The seal which I send with this is quite another thing. I desire that you remit it to the person who came from Brussels to see me last winter, as you know, and that you say to him at the same time that the motto has never been so true."

From time to time a few meagre details leaked out about the Royal captives, which Fersen notes in his *Journal* :

" *Jan.* 30.—They tell M. Quidor, who is here, that they are going to declare the Dauphin illegitimate, and shut the Queen up in the Salpétrière. One dare not even think of such a horror, but everything is possible.*

" *Feb.* 16.—Letters from Paris to La Haye say the Queen is much changed and has got very thin, but she is well ; that the Dauphin is charming, and that his guards cry when they have to leave him.

" *March* 31.—Received a letter from the Duchesse de Polignac telling me she has re-

* This was only one of the many wild rumours afloat with no foundation.

ceived news of the Queen from a doctor—it must be La Caze.

"*May* 22.—La Caze has been to the Temple. He found the Queen very little changed, but Mme Elisabeth so changed that he did not recognise her till the Queen called her '*ma sœur*'; she wore a nightcap and a very common gown of printed calico.

"Little Madame's body all covered with abscesses. She is threatened with a decline, but her youth and great care may pull her through. They say the young King has been ill, and that the Assembly refused the doctor the Queen asked for on the ground that he was an aristocrat!

"*June* 28.—Mercy says that the Queen has been very ill, but that she is well now, and that she has been extremely well looked after in her illness.

"*July* 10.—A woman just come from Paris says that things are beginning to look better for the Royal family—that the Queen takes walks, and that she is cheered when she is seen, that even '*Vive le Dauphin!*' is cried.

"*July* 12.—Bad news from France. . . . The Dauphin separated from the Queen and put into another room in the Temple. That seems to me a very bad look-out. What a

terrible grief for the Queen! Unhappy princess!"

Fersen could fully realise the anguish of the Queen in being forcibly parted from her little son. It was indeed an agonising scene.

When the six Municipals entered the Queen's room, on July 3, she and Madame Elisabeth were mending some clothes by the light of a candle and the little Dauphin was asleep in bed. His mother had hung a shawl near him to curtain off the light. Little Madame was reading aloud to the two ladies as they worked.

"We have come," said the Municipals, "by order of the House to tell you that the separation of Capet's son from his mother has been voted."

The Queen rose, and all the fierceness of a mother's love surged and rose within her. Like a tigress at bay she stood by her child's bed, facing the Municipals. She wept, she screamed, she threatened, she implored, her self-control entirely forsook her, and she fought desperately for her child.

It was all to no purpose. She had to give up the frightened little boy, who clung screaming to her skirts; she even had to coax him with tender words to go with the Municipals.

"Come, darling," she said, "you must obey, and you must go with these gentlemen."

. . . . .

All this time Fersen's mind was teeming with plans of rescue for the Queen, but obstacles and difficulties presented themselves at every turn. An unwise step, a false move, might cost the Queen her life, and the utmost caution was necessary.

In writing to M. de Mercy he confesses that "the more he considers all that has taken place the more he is confirmed in his opinion that the best way of serving the Queen is *to do nothing for her*, "but," he adds, "it is awful to have to limit one's zeal to inaction."

In the past the Count's zeal had sometimes outrun his discretion, but he realised now that under the present circumstances "discretion indeed was the better part of valour."

The terrible feeling of his own helplessness weighed on him like a nightmare—it almost unhinged his brain. Scheme after scheme presented itself to his mind; he strove unceasingly, and he wrote incessantly; indeed his extreme agitation of mind seems to have produced a certain incoherence in his writings at that time.

He left Düsseldorf in April and returned to Brussels, where he spent the remaining part of the year. Elizabeth, Lady Holland, makes an interesting mention of him in her *Journal*, dated August 13, 1793:

"M. de Fersen, the lover of the unhappy Queen, came to see me," she says. "He is tall and stately, and has the pretension in his manner of a favourite; his devoted attachment to the Queen, even in her prison, makes him interesting."

As the summer of 1793 wore on, the news from Paris became more and more alarming. Fersen writes:

"*Aug.* 12.—Letters from Paris say nothing about the Queen. One from the Duchesse de Maillé to her daughter says in a veiled manner that she is in *great danger*.

"*Aug.* 14.—The papers of the 10th deny the false rumours about the Queen, and declare she is in the Conciergerie.

"*Aug.* 25.—The *Gazette de France* of the 20th says that the Prosecutor of the Revolutionary Tribunal has asked for evidence against the Queen, and that it has been decreed to give it to him. This makes me shudder. I am certain that there can be no case against her, but one will be made. . . . In the Ham-

burg newspapers there were details about the transportation of the Queen to the Conciergerie which are to be found in no other papers. They were dreadful.

"*Sept.* 13.—News from Paris. . . . Very bad about the Queen. The trial is about to begin. . . . May God preserve her and give me the joy of seeing her again some day.

"*Sept.* 26.—They say from Paris that the Queen has been subjected to an examination from the Revolutionary Tribunal; that they asked if she were the widow of Louis Capet, that she replied, 'You know I am the widow of your King.' Upon a second question she replied, 'You can be my executioners and my murderers, but you can never be my judges!' after which she had a nervous attack and had to be taken back."

Early in October Fersen, with a party of friends, visited in the prison of St. Elisabeth a man who had frustrated the dearest hope of his life—Drouet, the postman of St. Ménéhould, who had arrested the King at Varennes! "The sight of this infamous rascal put me into a fury," writes the Count, "and the effort which I made not to say anything to him, on account of the Abbé de Limon and the Comte de Fitzjames, who were with us, made

me ill. . . . Drouet told Metternich that if the Powers gained a victory and marched on Paris her death would be a certainty; that the young King had nothing to fear; that the Queen was not ill-treated, that a commissioner attended to her wants; that when she arrived (at the Conciergerie) there was only a miserable pallet; that having found her with a cold they asked her the cause: she said it was the dampness of the cell, being so low; that another room higher up was prepared for her, where good linen and a good bed with mattresses were provided, and that every care was taken of her.

From a Jacobin named Aubré, who had just arrived from Paris, Fersen gleaned fresh details of the situation of the unhappy Queen. He learnt that the Queen was not ill-treated, that everything in her room was very clean, and that she was served with a good *bourgeois* dinner every day. Her gaoler and his wife had been removed (they had shown signs of sympathy for their prisoner), and the Queen now looked after herself.

Later on, when all was over, Fersen received further details about the Conciergerie from the Chevalier de Rougeville, who had made an unsuccessful attempt to rescue Marie

Antoinette. He jots down these details in his *Journal*:

"The Queen's room was on the ground floor, the third door on the right as you come in, opposite Custine's cell; her window opened on to the courtyard, which was full of prisoners who used to look in at the window and insult the Queen. Her room was small, damp, and dark; there was neither stove nor fireplace in it; there were three beds—one for the Queen, close to it one for her woman, and one for the two gendarmes who never left her room. The Queen's bed was a wooden one, like the others; it had two mattresses, and a worn and dirty blanket, such as are used by the other prisoners. The sheets were of a coarse grey material. There were no bed-curtains, but instead there was an old screen.

"The Queen wore a black jacket; her hair was cut in front and behind, and was quite grey; she had grown so thin that he hardly recognised her, and so weak that she could hardly stand. The woman who waited on her was a kind of *poissarde*, of whom she complained bitterly. . . . The Queen always went to bed dressed in black, expecting to be murdered or taken to execution any night, and wishing to go to her death in mourning."

. . . . . .

MARIE ANTOINETTE BEFORE THE TRIBUNAL.

THE QUEEN'S SENTENCE

It was half-past three in the morning of October 16, 1793. The Queen's trial, which had lasted for two long days, was now over. The jury had just returned to the Court with their verdict, and the fate of Marie Antoinette was sealed. The great Hall of Audience in the Palais de Justice was dimly lit by a few candles. The judges, the jury, and the spectators all looked pale and fatigued after the long night's sitting. The jury had returned a verdict of guilty on the four charges preferred against Marie Antoinette.

. . . . .

"The accused was brought into the Court by two warders to hear her sentence. Her figure was thin and bowed down, her hair was grey, and her cheeks were sunken, but there was the same old 'unflinching poise' of the head, the same royal bearing, the same old flashing spirit.

"She wore a black gown, and a lace fichu was fastened at her breast; her white widow's cap was trimmed with a knot of *crêpe*. Her fingers strummed on the rail before her as she stood to hear the sentence of death; her face was perfectly impassive and showed an utter indifference to what she heard.

"The condemned Queen was led away. She

spoke not a word, nor made a gesture. She crossed the Court without either seeing or hearing, but on reaching the barrier behind which the people were packed she majestically raised her head." *

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An hour later Marie Antoinette was back again in her cell. A faint glimmer of daylight stole in through the barred window. A little bowl of soup, untasted, stood on a table. The Queen was writing her famous letter to Madame Elisabeth. Tears slowly trickled down her face as she bent over her writing; they made sad little blots on the paper.

A horrible death awaited her in a few hours' time, but her mind hardly dwelt on it. Her thoughts were with those she was going to leave behind—her beloved children, whose future filled her with sad forebodings, her sister-in-law, whose devotion had been so wonderful through all this time of trial, and her many friends who had served her so loyally in the dark as well as in the bright days. Among these Axel Fersen took the first place in her thoughts. In those last hours the Queen thought very lovingly and tenderly of the friend who had been so much to her for so

* Hilaire Belloc in his *Life of Marie Antoinette.*

many years. He seemed to be near her as she wrote—she could almost see the anguish on his face, and she could guess the exceeding bitterness of his soul when he should know her fate. Another tear fell and blotted the paper as she wrote:

"I had friends, and the thought of separating from them and their sorrows is one of the greatest griefs that death can cause me. They must at least be told that I thought of them when death was at hand."

CHAPTER XV

1793–1810

Fersen receives news of the Queen's death—His grief—He is recalled by the Regent of Sweden—Two years of leisure—Gustavus IV restores him to favour—The Congress of Rastadt—His reception by Napoleon—His mission to Carlsruhe—The bad policy of the King of Sweden—The Swedish Revolution of 1809—The end of the House of Vasa—The election of a Danish prince to the Swedish throne—Sudden death of the Crown Prince—Fersen is accused of poisoning the Crown Prince—The riot of June 20, 1810—Fersen is murdered—His last words.

THE news of the Queen's death reached Axel Fersen on Sunday, October 20. It came to him in an indirect way. His *Journal* says :

" Grandmaison came to tell me that Ackermann, a banker, had received a letter from a correspondent in Paris, which told him that the Queen's sentence had been pronounced the day before; that it was to have been carried out at once, but that circumstances had delayed it; that the hired people began to murmur, and that this morning Marie

Antoinette would appear at the *National Window* ! *

"Although I was prepared for this since the removal to the Conciergerie, the certainty of it overwhelmed me. I had not the strength to feel anything. I went out to speak of this terrible calamity to my friends Mme de Fitzjames and the Baron de Breteuil. They were not at home. On finding them, I wept with them, especially with Madame de Fitzjames. The newspapers of the 17th speak of it; it was at half-past eleven on the 16th that this hideous crime was committed. And Divine vengeance has not yet burst on those monsters ! "

No sleep came to soothe Fersen's anguish that Sunday night, the darkest night of his existence. As he tossed about feverishly on his bed the past nineteen years of his life, charged with memories, seemed to rise up before him. He saw them all lit up with the radiant light of his wonderful love—that love which had burned with so steadfast a flame, and which had brightened all the dark places of his life. Now the light had gone out and all was darkness. His path would henceforth be always in the shadow. Life was now only

* The guillotine.

a thing to be lived and done with as quickly as possible; it held for him no more hopes and joys; it contained only the dregs of an empty cup. For the next few days he lived as if in a dream.

On Monday, October 21, he writes in his *Journal*:

"I could think of nothing but my loss. It is awful not to have had any details, and to think of her all alone in her last hours, with no one to comfort her, no one to whom she could speak and give her last wishes. It is all too dreadful. Monsters of hell! No—I shall never rest satisfied until her death is avenged."

The instinct of vengeance seemed to be the only vital feeling left in Fersen's bruised and lacerated soul. "Oh that I had armies to crush the vermin with!" was his constant cry.

He found some solace in talking over the old days with his many Royalist friends in Brussels, and for all those who had ever loved the Queen he kept a warm place in his heart. He followed with keen interest the progress of the war; and the extraordinary successes of the Revolutionary Armies filled his soul with bitterness. On the last day of 1793 he

confesses in his *Journal* to the amazing fact "that after an eight months' campaign with Austrian, Prussian, English, Spanish, Sardinian, Italian, and German forces, French territory remained intact except on two small points!"

Fersen still held his nominal position as "*Ambassador to King Louis XVII*" at Brussels. This became a source of embarrassment to the Regent of Sweden, who had recently detached himself from the policy of Gustavus III, and, accepting the new order of things, had come to an understanding with the French Republic.

In March 1794 the Count was recalled on the pretext of having taken part in a plot to overthrow the Regency and to declare the young Gustavus King before he had attained his majority.

The same year Count Frederick Fersen died, and Axel, as the eldest son and heir, had to spend a good deal of time in Sweden, occupying himself with family affairs and the management of his estates at Steninge, Lyung, and Malsäker. The next two years were spent between his ancestral home and visits to the Courts of Vienna, Berlin, and Dresden.

When the young King Gustavus IV attained his majority, in November 1796, Fersen was promptly restored to favour. He was sent in 1799 as plenipotentiary to the Congress of Rastadt. This was a Peace Congress held for the purpose of rearranging the map of Germany and settling some details of the Treaty of Campo Formio.

General Bonaparte, fresh from his brilliant victories in Italy, had just come to Rastadt when the Count arrived. The *rôle* Fersen had played in the Revolution and his devotion to the Bourbon cause were well known to Napoleon, who received him with icy coldness. "The Court of Sweden seems to take pleasure," he said to him in frigid tones, "in sending on all occasions ambassadors and ministers who are personally disagreeable to every French citizen," adding, "that the French Republic would not suffer men too well known for their connection with the former Court of France to be sent to mock the Minister of the first nation of the earth."

When he wrote his *Memoirs* at St. Helena, many years afterwards, Napoleon speaks of Fersen as one "whom he treated very badly at Rastadt."

Shortly after the Congress episode Fersen

was sent by Gustavus IV on a special mission to the Court of Carlsruhe, to conclude the marriage negotiations between the King and the granddaughter of the Grand Duke of Baden. Upon his return to Sweden he was loaded with honours by his sovereign.

In 1799 he was made Chancellor of the University of Upsala and a peer of the realm. In 1800, the year of his mother's death, he was created Knight of the Order of the Seraphim, and a member of the Regency Council during the King's temporary absence. The following year he was made Grand Marshal, one of the highest posts that can be attained in Sweden.

The reception Fersen met with at Rastadt had by no means predisposed him in favour of Napoleon. As for the King of Sweden, his hatred for Bonaparte amounted to a positive mania. He firmly believed that Napoleon was the Anti-Christ and the Great Beast of the Apocalypse, and he considered it a just and holy thing to wage war against such a "monster." Gustavus was a weak, hot-headed, and obstinate man; he inherited all the weaknesses of his father, with none of his good points. In direct opposition to the will of his people

he joined, in 1805, the great coalition against Napoleon, and plunged his country into a most disastrous and ruinous war. Fersen accompanied the King to Swedish Pomerania, but his duties there were more of a diplomatic than a military nature. He clearly saw the utter futility of this war, and he did not hesitate to point out to the King the uselessness of prolonging such a hopeless struggle, especially after Russia and Prussia, Sweden's allies, had made their peace with France. Sweden had no chance whatever against the armies of Napoleon, she was groaning under a heavy taxation, and war could only lead her to utter ruin.

Fersen was no lover of the Republican armies, but his common sense and his patriotism impelled him to dissuade his sovereign from rushing headlong to destruction. Gustavus IV had by no means won the love and confidence of his army. The soldiers disliked and despised him, for he expected impossibilities of them, yet refused to share their hardships and privations. He was of that race of "great boasters" who say fine things but do very little; his soldiers therefore were impelled by no feelings of personal loyalty and attachment when fighting under his

banner. The King, who was extremely obstinate, resented Fersen's frank advice on the subject of continuing the war; he ordered him to return to Sweden and to accompany the Queen on her journey into Scania.

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More than a hundred years before a strange and terrible vision had appeared to Charles XI of Sweden. He saw the great Hall of the Estates draped in black and lit by many candles. A bleeding corpse, clothed in all the apparel of royalty, sat on the throne, sceptre in hand. An old man and a child stood on either side of the throne. In mournful and sinister tones, which froze his blood, a phantom voice wailed in the King's ear: "Woe! woe! Woe to the House of Vasa!"

Now, in 1809, the great House of Vasa was tottering and trembling before its fall.

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The King's mad policy soon brought the country almost to the verge of ruin. The southern provinces were invaded by the Danes, Finland was taken by the Russians (and has remained in their possession ever since), the

exchequer was empty, and dangers threatened on all sides. The position of affairs became so unbearable that the Swedes resolved to stand no longer the caprices of a half-crazy monarch, whose misgovernment was leading their country to certain ruin. A bloodless Revolution was brought about in 1809; Gustavus was forced to abdicate; the States renounced for ever their allegiance to him and his heirs; and the Crown reverted to the former Regent, Charles, Duke of Sudermania, who ascended the throne under the name of Charles XIII.

He was an old man and childless; with him therefore the House of Vasa would come to an end.

A Danish prince, Christian of Schleswig-Holstein-Augustenburg was adopted as heir to the throne, and he took up his residence in Sweden in the winter of 1810.

We have seen that the sympathies of the Duke of Sudermania had turned towards the French Republic early in 1794. When he came to the throne in 1809, he looked coldly upon Fersen, as a leader of the Conservative party and a devoted adherent to the House of Bourbon and the House of Vasa. The very fact of the late King having loaded

the Count with benefits made him unpopular with the new *régime*. He was looked upon with coldness and suspicion by the *entourage* of Charles XIII. Less than six months after his arrival the young Crown Prince, while reviewing some troops in Scania, was seized with an apoplectic stroke. His sudden death caused the rumour to be spread that he had been poisoned. Political passions were just then at fever heat, and the partisans of the new *régime* accused the partisans of the old *régime* of being implicated in the plot. Another election to the throne was imminent, and the enemies of the House of Vasa resolved to strike so crushing a blow on the Conservative party that they would never seek to re-establish the old dynasty. For this end they must find a victim, and the Comte de Fersen, as the leader of the old aristocratic party, appeared to them the most desirable person for their purpose. The rumour was diligently spread that he and his sister had poisoned the Crown Prince.

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It was June 20, 1810, a day full of memories for Axel Fersen. That day, nineteen years ago, he had taken the Royal

family out of Paris. It was a day of evil omen.

The Count was well aware of the part the people supposed him to have played in the death of the Crown Prince. He knew, by the veiled insults and the threatening letters he had received of late, that the word "Poisoner" was breathed against him. And to-day, June 20, he had to face his traducers. For the obsequies of the Crown Prince were to take place, and he, as the Grand Marshal of Sweden, had to take a leading part in the ceremony.

Charles XIII had been previously warned by the authorities, of the dangers the Grand Marshal would run on this occasion, but he had only replied, "It will not hurt this proud lord to receive a good lesson for once."

At eleven o'clock in the morning Fersen set out to meet his fate.

The following account is taken from *Le Comte de Fersen et la Cour de France*, by the Baron de Klinckowström:

"In full ceremonial dress he entered the gilded coach, drawn by six white horses, which was to convey him to the place where he was to meet the funeral procession, and from thence to the city. The Light Horse of the Guard

advanced at the head of the *cortège*, which was closed by the squadron of cavalry that had accompanied the mortal remains of the Prince from Scania. The procession was received, almost before it entered the capital, with insulting shouts from the populace; they even spat upon Count Fersen's coach. In the Hornsgatan copper coins were flung at the coach; the windows were smashed and Fersen's face was cut. At the Cornmarket the populace abused and threatened him, tearing up the pavement stones to fling at his carriage. The coachman was hit so hard that he fell upon his knees. In the High Street the shouts and stone-throwing were continued, and at last, at the top of the square where the Riddarhus ('House of Nobles') stands . . . an immense crowd prevented Count Fersen's coach from passing. . . . The people flung themselves on the coach, unharnessed the horses, and dragged out Count Fersen. The Grand Marshal made an effort to shake himself free, and escaping for an instant from the hands of the ruffians who swarmed about him, he darted into the first door in front of him (it was that of a *café*), and ran upstairs to the first floor, where he took refuge in a room. At that moment General Silfversparre, who

had been informed of Count Fersen's danger, came bravely to his aid; but he had only sixteen men and one officer with him. What could that little troop do against the howling and threatening crowd?

"The mob burst into the house and swarmed up the staircase. They reviled the Count in the most horrible manner, tore off him his decorations, his cloak, etc., and took his sword, flinging them all out of the window to the rabble beneath, who tore them into shreds.

"M. de Silfversparre made an attempt to appease the fury of the people by promising to shut up their victim in prison till he could be properly tried. For this purpose he ordered a small detachment of his guards to place themselves before the door of the house where Fersen had taken refuge. But the Count was not half way down the staircase before blows were showered upon him from sticks and umbrellas, he was wounded on the head, and his white hair torn out in handfuls.

"He was now in the Square. A battalion of Guards was there, with Generals Adlercreutz and Vegesach; but they turned back and rode off at a trot, under pretext of 'facilitating

the deliverance of the Count from the hands of his tormentors ! '

"The wretches then dragged their unhappy victim in front of the troops, who looked on stolidly, to the Hôtel de Ville. There, although surrounded by the mass of his tormentors, he was given a moment's respite. They seemed to give him this breathing-space from an impulse of pity. Seating himself on a bench, he asked for a drop of water; it was brought to him by a merciful soldier of the Guard.

"But soon the mob again began to threaten him with death, and to reproach him with having poisoned the Crown Prince. They struck him with their fists and their sticks, they tore out his hair, and also his earrings, with pieces of the flesh.

"The people outside, closely packed in the courtyard of the Hôtel de Ville, shouted for the Comte de Fersen to be delivered to them.

. . . . .

"He was dragged out again into the Square, half dead already. Howls of execration greeted him. There was a hideous rush—and the mob closed on their victim.

"With his last remaining strength the Count

feebly rose on his knees. 'O God,' he prayed, 'who callest me to Thyself, I pray Thee not to lay this sin to their charge.'

"Nineteen years after the fateful flight to Varennes the peace of death came to the wearied soul of Axel Fersen."

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A Queen's Knight.

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